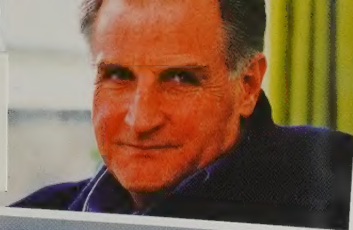


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Geoff Muldaur

"The Butterfield Band was like a high-speed train, just groove, groove, groove, kill, kill, kill."



Reviews

Daniel Romano

"A strong case for best-of-the-year contention."

penguin eggs

"I'm a
frustrated
fiction
writer."

frank turner

"I was into
Iron Maiden"

tom russell

hassekou kouyate

stéphanie lépine

weather station

t. buckley

son, cutting & kerr

wort hannam

ML

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P46

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2015

MUSIC

Issue No. 67 autumn 2015 \$5.99



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03

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SHANE KOYCZAN • April 2

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LA BOHÈME
October 18

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A NEW WAY OF SEEING
January 31

Royal Opera House
Cinema Season
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March 20

FAMILY SERIES

Treehouse TV's
SPLASH'N BOOTS
October 4

NOISY THEATRE with
MARY LAMBERT:
FAMILY FUN
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THE WIGGLES:
ROCK & ROLL PRESCHOOL
October 26

NOISY THEATRE with
MARY LAMBERT:
SWINGING ON A STAR
February 3

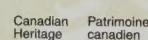
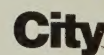
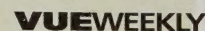
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Cover Story

44 Tom Russell

His sprawling, 52-track cowboy odyssey, *The Rose of Roscrae*, draws from the gritty folklore of the old American West. It's a compelling piece of work, graced with storied voices from both the past and present.

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Tamara Lindeman holed up in a rundown 19th-century mansion near Paris to make her bold new record with her pal Bahamas.

26 Slocan Ramblers

This bluegrass quartet sees its star rising, propelled by a raw energy captured on their new live-off-the-floor recording.

28 Stéphanie Lépine

One of Quebec's finest fiddlers stars on three new discs steeped in her traditional roots.

30 Chris MacLean

The natural beauty surrounding her home in rural Quebec adds great colour to her songs.

32 Bassekou Kouyate

Mentored by Ali Farka Touré, the Malian master of the ngoni redefines African music.

34 T. Buckley Trio

Gigging regularly in a Calgary wine bar turned this trio into a tight, proficient unit with a formidable new album to boast about.

36 The Honey Dewdrops

The magical harmonies of this Baltimore-based duo has our J. Poet gushing. Besides, David Francey inspired their songwriting.

38 Simpson, Cutting & Kerr

Three English kindred spirits, who also happen to be masters of their art and simply love to play. What's there not to like?

40 John Wort Hannam

While more personal than in the past, his latest disc also offers a raw narrative about the horrors of native residential schools.

42 Gill Landry

The former Old Crow Medicine Show multi-instrumentalist has given up folk ballads about bad men and hard times to walk among the dark shadows.

22 Frank Turner

An articulate force of nature with a razor-sharp wit and an infectiously engaging personality, meet the shouty folk superstar, sort of, with an Iron Maiden tattoo on his leg.

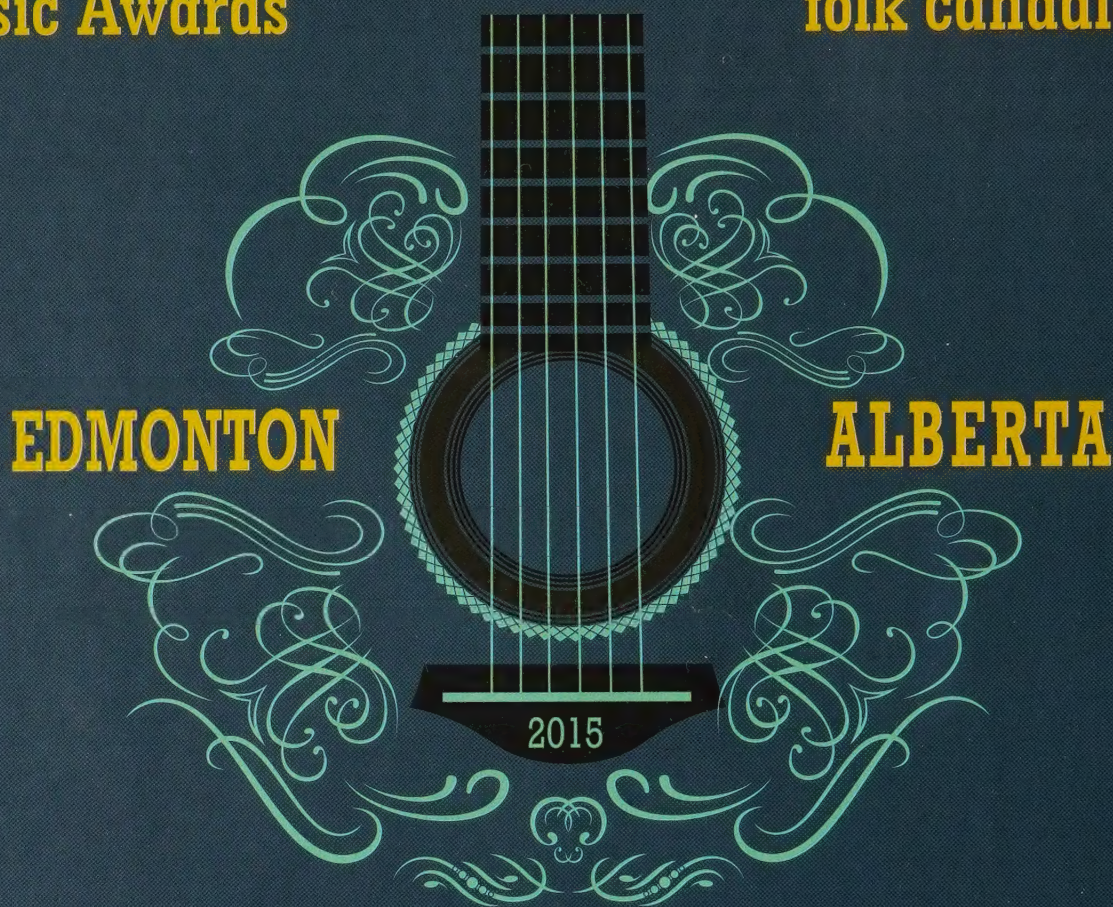




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clubs Northern Lights et Uptown ainsi que par la CKUA radio

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Few young songwriters now tap into the the rich vein of traditional songs that sparked the imagination of Bob Dylan.

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reminisces about The Jim Kweskin Jug Band, Paul Butterfield, *Brazil* ... and brings us up to date about his latest projects in *The Penguin Eggs Interview*.

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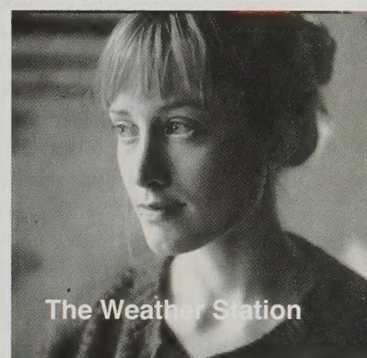
David Sherman takes venue operators to task for their lack of respect for musicians.



Simpson, Cutting and Kerr



Geoff Muldaur



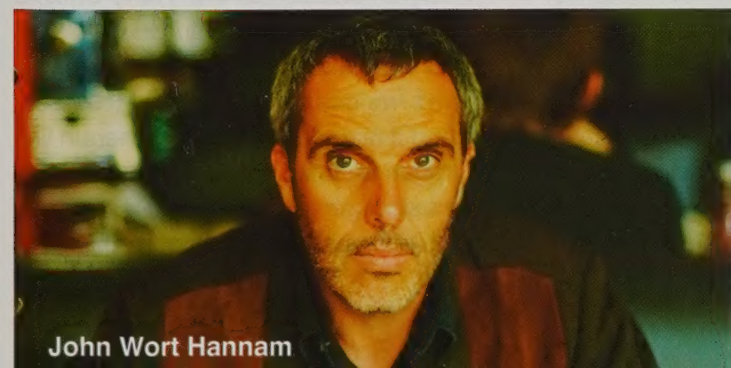
The Weather Station



B.B. King



The Honey Dewdrops



John Wort Hannam

penguin eggs

The Folk, Roots and World Music Magazine

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Tel: (780) 433-8287

Fax: (780) 437-4603

www.penguineggs.ab.ca

e-mail: penguineggs@shaw.ca

Editor: Roddy Campbell

Managing Editor: Annemarie Hamilton

Production: Doug Swanson

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This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones's wonderful album *Penguin Eggs* — a collection of mainly traditional British folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for such diverse artists as Bob Dylan, Warren Zevon and Kate Rusby.

Nic, sadly, suffered horrific injuries in a car crash in 1982 and has never fully recovered. In 2012, however, he finally made an emotional comeback, performing at several events throughout the summer. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation makes *Penguin Eggs* such an outrageously fine recording. It's available through Topic Records. This magazine strives to reiterate its spirit.

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Canada



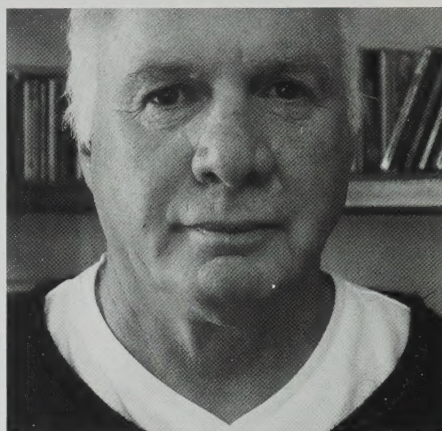
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Editorial



Oysterband's John Jones holds court. Chest puffed out. Delightfully animated. Tilting at windmills. It's the night after another marathon Edmonton Folk Music Festival and we're all gathered at a friend's for a curry, the odd dram and the craic.

"Who have you heard of late that has really impressed you?" I want to know. Oddly enough, John pauses for reflection. Salutes the passing of Bellowhead. Makes mention that Eliza Carthy has been very quiet of late. But then he laments the lack of truly unique talent rising through the folk ranks in the U.K.

"They just don't have a grounding in the tradition," John says. "Bob Dylan knew a thousand folk songs before he started to write his own. That's how he became such a great writer. Those old songs have been perfected over centuries. How can you not learn from them?"

Funnily enough, Tom Russell said almost exactly the same thing when interviewed for this issue.

Both Tom and John quoted from Bob Dylan's MusiCares acceptance speech as Person of the Year last February. Here's an excerpt:

"I learned lyrics and how to write them from listening to folk songs," said Dylan. "And I played them...back when nobody was doing it. Sang nothing but these folk songs, and they gave me the code for everything that's fair game, that everything

belongs to everyone. For three or four years, all I listened to were folk standards. I went to sleep singing folk songs. I sang them everywhere... If you sang *John Henry* as many times as me, you'd have written, 'How many roads must a man walk down?' too."

It's a fascinating speech, particularly as he reveals the traditional songs that inspired his classics: *Maggie's Farm*, *Hard Rain*, *Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues*, *Highway 61*, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*...

The fact that the most influential songwriter of the 20th century first schooled himself in the Anglo-American folk canon, is no secret. But let's put it in perspective: The Beatles were singing *She Loves You*, (*Yeah, Yeah, Yeah*) while Dylan wrote *Masters of War* with a melody taken from the traditional song *Nottamun Town*.

Incidentally, 50 years ago this summer, on the night of July 25, 1965, Dylan made his monumental artistic leap at the Newport Folk Festival, when he strapped on a sunburst Fender Stratocaster and changed the course of popular music.

Folk, of course, would never be the same again. Definitions grew broader to include the introspective singer/songwriter. Ad infinitum.

And they dominate the discs sent for review to *Penguin Eggs* today. Most feature original material. Ani Di-Franco and Bruce Springsteen have a lot to answer for. *Black Jack Davey* and *Ommie Wise* are undiscovered aliens. So tell me, why would anyone master the mysteries of an instrument in order to accompany doggerel?

Dylan started out with Harry Smith's epic *Anthology of American Folk Music* and Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie's various recordings for Moe Asch. And it is undoubtedly true, therein lie traces of "the code" that produced a musical genius.

"John, make mine a double."

— Roddy Campbell

The Record That Changed My Life

Carla Luft



Cara Luft recently formed **The Small Glories** with JD Edwards. Luft pays tribute to Dick Gaughan's *A Handful of Earth*.

It was my twelfth birthday, May 27, 1986, and true to form, my folk-singing father presented me with “the annual birthday album”—Dick Gaughan’s *Handful of Earth* (1981). Something shifted inside of me. All those years steeped in Brit-folk, Canadiana, Buddy Holly, The Everly Brothers ... inevitably I’d be influenced and moved by such a seminal album. It seeped deep into both my conscious and subconscious, helping to form the musician I am today. And it resonated with the values with which I was raised.

Calgary in the ’70s and ’80s was not the most progressive of Canadian cities, and yet my family was a liberal oasis of red in a sea of blue. House concerts were a regular occurrence, as were weekly visits to various local folk clubs and festivals. Magazines on the kitchen table ranged from *Banjo Newsletter* to *Maclean’s*, no blaring TV but the kitchen radio constantly tuned to CBC. We were an informed family, a family that sang about labour, one that cared about social justice and human rights, and one that entertained itself by playing records and all sorts of instruments.

No surprise, then, that my dad bought me a Scottish folkie’s album that was, as one reviewer stated so perfectly, “emotionally charged, defiant, inspired, hopeful and downright angry”. The arrival of this album couldn’t have been more serendipitous; it was perfect for a kid in the throes of puberty, and who picked up her first guitar a year before.

I was initially drawn to the guitar work and melodic structure of the songs. From the first track, *Erin Go Braugh*, I was hooked. Here was a song about prejudice and one full of angst, and although at my young age I wasn’t able to decipher all of the lyrics, I knew from the production of the song that there was some serious depth here. When Brian McNeill’s fiddle came in, it hit me to the core.

Dick is a master of alternative tunings, creating a guitar sound that is both full and rich. He uses a pick in a way that would boggle minds (*Scojum Waltz/Randers Hopsa* and *The Workers’ Song*), and then surprise the listener again with his fine fingerstyle work, particularly on the track *The Snows They Melt the Soonest*.

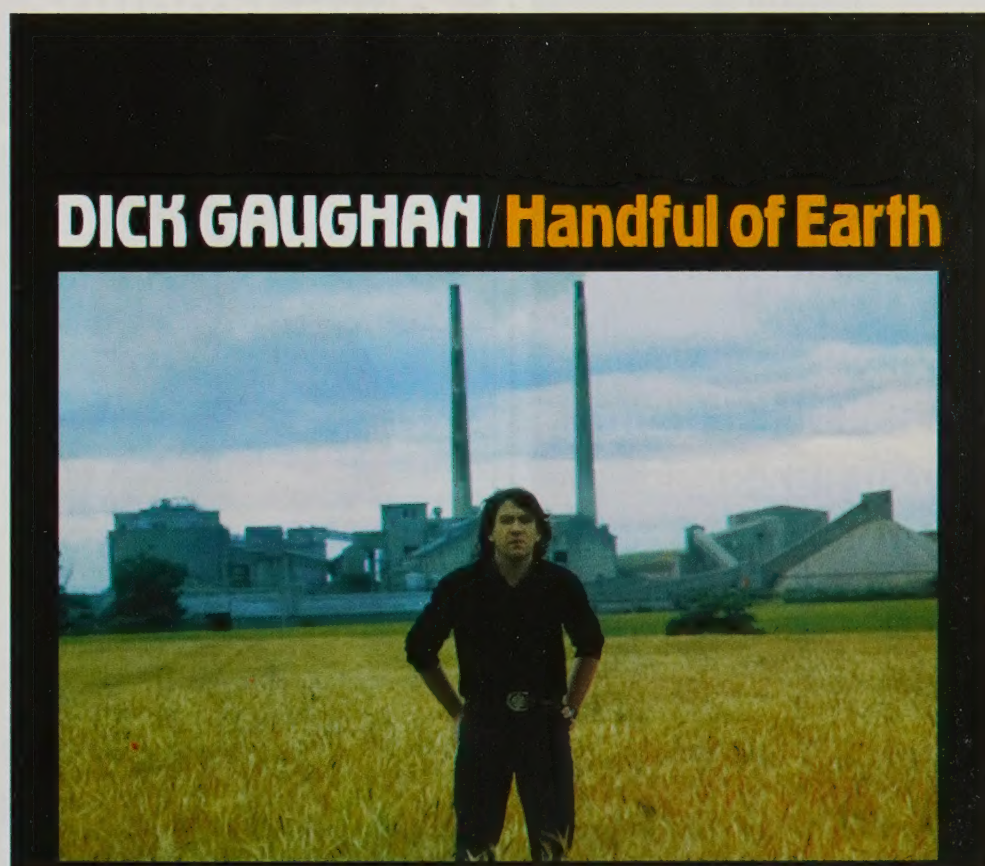
I remember e-mailing Dick in the late ’90s to ask about the various tunings he used on this particular album, and he was incredibly gracious in writing back. I didn’t have a printer and so scribbled his reply by hand on a scrap piece of paper and accidentally wrote some of the tunings down incorrectly. I ended up composing *Come All You Sailors* shortly after that, and was always attributing the tuning to Dick—it was a DADDAD tuning. When I met him at the Vancouver Folk Festival several years later, I intro-

duced myself and thanked him for sharing this fabulous new tuning (that was wreaking havoc with my G string). He looked at me and said, “what the f*%& are you talking about?” [He mostly uses DADGAD]

The instrumentation on this album is at times surprising. Take *Both Sides the Tweed*, that has Dick singing to a keyboard. Halfway through the bass comes in, then a gorgeous call-and-response electric guitar part. This final track had me scratching my head the first few times. The listener expects to hear Dick’s unique guitar style, and instead he ends with an original political song with a sonic twist, forcing us to pay even closer attention to his lyrics.

There’s something about the production that keeps this album on my top-10 of all time. There’s an artistry in its simplicity, and the extra touches (particularly the doubled-up guitars and vocals) contribute beautifully to each track.

I was the queen of the mix tape growing up, and this album made its way onto myriad collections. To this day, I purchase copies for friends, prefacing that it is one of the finest folk albums of all time. I honestly cannot imagine how my own personal guitar style would have turned out had it not been for a *Handful of Earth*.



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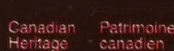
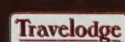
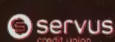
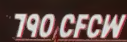
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stingray top 10

1. **Pharis and Jason Romero**
A Wanderer I'll Stay (Independent)
2. **Steph Cameron**
Sad-Eyed Lonesome Lady (Pheromone)
3. **The Sweet Lowdown**
Chasing The Sun (Independent)
4. **Ken Whiteley And The Beulah Band**
Ken Whiteley And The Beulah Ban (Borealis)
5. **Jayme Stone**
The Lomax Project (Borealis)
6. **Gabrielle Papillon**
The Tempest Of Old (Independent)
7. **Antique Persuasion**
Don't Forget Me Little Darling ... (Voxhall Records)
8. **Mandolin Orange**
Such Jubilee (Yep Roc)
9. **Jami Lynn**
Fall Is a Good Time to Die (Independent)
10. **Jill Zmud**
small matters of life and death (Independent)

The most-played folk and roots discs played nationally by Stingray Music (formerly Galaxie Radio) throughout May, June and July, 2015.

fred's records top 5

1. **Fortunate Ones**
The Bliss (Old Farm Pony)
2. **The Once**
The Once (Borealis)
3. **Amelia Curran**
They Promised You Mercy (Universal)
4. **The Once**
Departures (Nettwerk)
5. **Ouroboros**
Ouroboros (Independent)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2015 at Freds Records, 198 Duckworth Street, St. John's, NL, 1C 1G5



The Fortunate Ones

chris maclean's all-time top 10



Chris MacLean

Willie P. Bennet
Tryin' to Start Out Clean (Woodshed Records)

Bruce Cockburn
Slow Down Fast (True North)

Leonard Cohen
The Future (Columbia)

Steve Goodman
The Essential Steve Goodman (Buddah Records)

John Hartford
Steam Powered Aereo Plain (Warner Bros)

Meg Hutchinson
The Living Side (Red House Records)

Martin Joseph
Songs for the Coming Home (Pipe Records)

Joni Mitchell
Court and Spark (Rhino)

Jennifer Noxon
Sweet (Independent)

Jane Siberry
Bound by the Beauty (Reprise)

Chris MacLean's latest release is called Procrastinator. Our feature on Chris runs on page 30.

wfmfms top 10

1. **The Bros Landreth**
Let it Lie (Slate Creek Records)
2. **Nahko and Medicine for the People**
On the Verge (Ingrooves)
3. **Shake Graves**
And The War Came (Dualtone Music)
4. **Various Artists**
Native North America, Vol. 1 (Light In The Attic)
5. **Jose Gonzalez**
Vestiges and Claws (Mute)
6. **Romi Mayes**
Devil on Both Shoulders (Independent)
7. **Sufjan Steven**
Carrie & Lowell (Asthmatic Kitty)
8. **Sondorgo**
Tamburocket (Riverboat)
9. **Mac DeMarco**
Another One (Captured Tracks)
10. **The Weather Station**
Loyalty (Outside Music)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2015, at the Winnipeg Folk Music Festival's Music Store, 203-Bannatyne Ave., Winnipeg, MB. R3B 3P2

highlife top 10

1. **Alabama Shakes**
Sound & Color (MapleMusic)
2. **Frazey Ford**
Indian Ocean (Nettwerk)
3. **Nina Simone**
Sings The Blues (RCA)
4. **Whitehorse**
Leave No Bridge Unburned (Six Shooter)
5. **Leon Bridges**
Coming Home (World Circuit)
6. **Buena Vista Social Club**
Lost And Found (Bad Seed)
7. **Buffy Sainte-Marie**
Power In The Blood' (True North)
8. **St. Paul & The Broken Bones**
Half The City (Single Lock)
9. **Gary Clark Jr.**
Live (Warner)
10. **Pop Staples**
Don't Lose This (dBpm)

Based on album sales for May, June and July 2015 at
Highlife Records, 1317 Commercial Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3X5

heritage music & posters top 10

1. **Rhiannon Giddens**
Tomorrow Is My Turn (Warner Music)
2. **James McMurtry**
Complicated Games (Universal Music)
3. **Milk Carton Kids**
Monterey (Fab Distribution)
4. **Lee Harvey Osmond**
Beautiful Scars (Warner Music)
5. **Ian Tyson**
Carnero Vaguero (Stony Plain)
6. **Richard Thompson**
Still (Concord)
7. **Joni Mitchell**
Newport Folkfest July 1969 (Keyhole)
8. **Bonnie Raitt & Lowell George ...**
Ultrasonic Studios 1972 (Universal Music)
9. **Tom Phillips**
Mr. Superlove (Independent)
10. **Leeroy Stagger**
Dream It All Away (Rebeltone)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2015, at
Heritage Posters & Music, 1502-11Ave., SW, Calgary, AB, T3C 0M9



Joni Mitchell



Nina Simone

sillions top 10

1. **Patrick Watson**
Love Songs for Robots (Domino)
2. **Jean Leloup**
À Paradis City (Distribution Select)
3. **Francis Cabrel**
In Extremis (Tandem.mu)
4. **Leanoard Cohen**
Can't Forget (Columbia)
6. **Florent Volland**
Puamuna (Instinct/DEP)
6. **Louis-Jean Cormier**
Les Grandes Artères (Simone Records)
7. **Melody Gardot**
Currency of Man (Universal Music)
8. **B'ia**
Navegar (DEP)
9. **Tire Le Coyote**
Panorama (La Tribu/DEP)
10. **Fred Pellerin**
Plus tard qu'on pense (Tempête/DEP)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2015, at
Sillions, 1149 Avenue Cartier, Quebec, QC, G1R 2S9.

soundscapes top 10

1. **Alabama Shakes**
Sound & Color (MapleMusic)
2. **The Weather Station**
Loyalty (Outside Music)
3. **Sufjan Stevens**
Carrie & Lowell (Asthmatic Kitty)
4. **Tallest Man On Earth**
Dark Bird Is Home (Dead Oceans)
5. **Emmylou Harris & Rodney Crowell**
The Traveling Kind (Nonesuch)
6. **Various Artists**
Native North America (Light In The Attic)
7. **Jim O'Rourke**
Simple Songs (Drag City)
8. **Dylan, Cash & The Nashville Cats**
Dylan, Cash & The Nashville Cats (Sony)
9. **Neil Young & The Promise Of The Real**
The Monsanto Years (Reprise)
10. **Richard Thompson**
Still (Concord)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2015, at
Soundscapes, 572 College Street, Toronto, On, M6G 1B3

ckua top 20

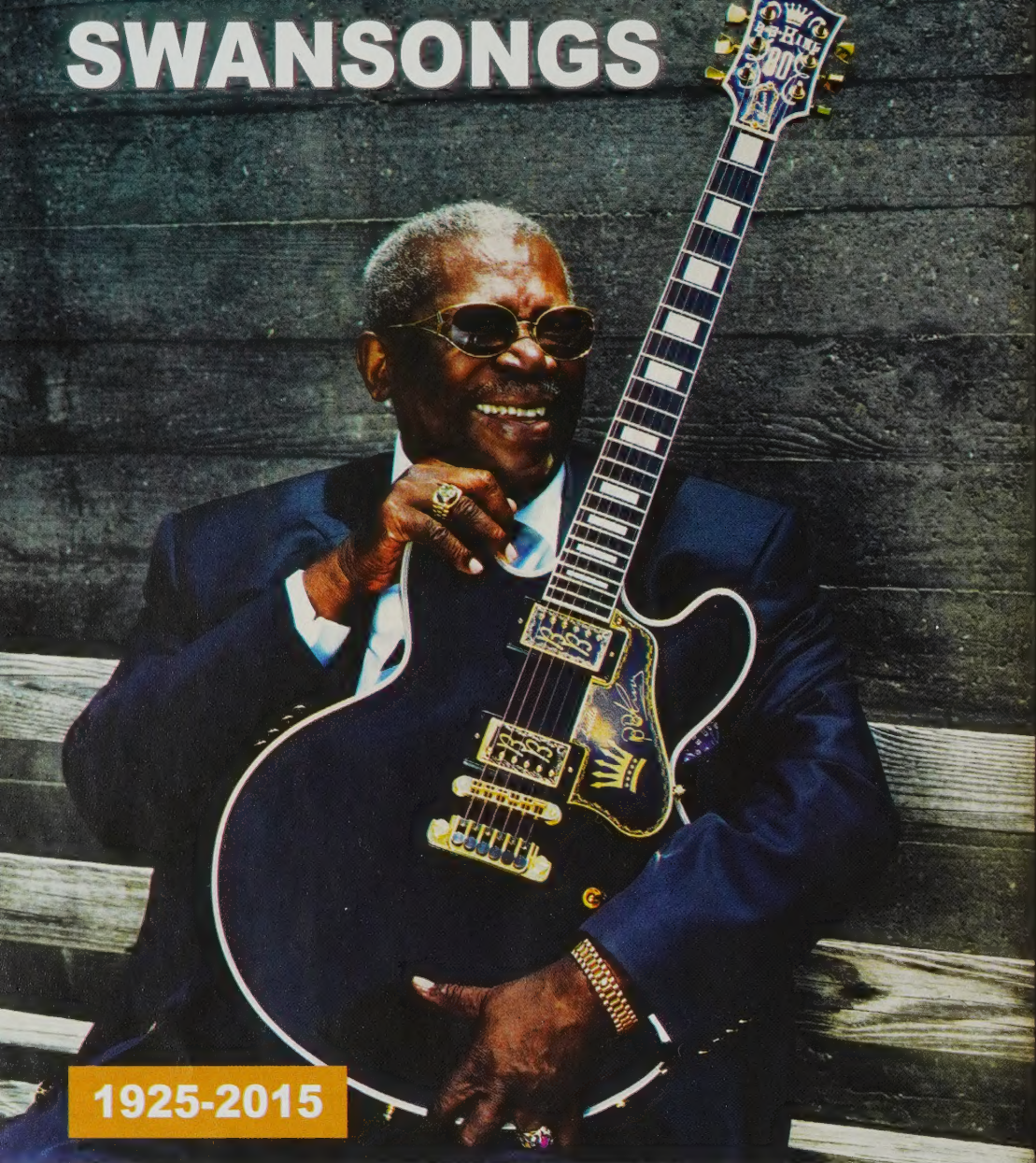
1. **Buffy Sainte-Marie**
Power In the Blood (True North)
2. **Alabama Shakes**
Sound & Color (MapleMusic)
3. **Leeroy Stagger**
Dream It All Away (Rebeltone)
4. **Leon Bridges**
Coming Home (Columbia)
5. **Emmylou Harris & Rodney Crowell**
The Traveling Kind (Nonesuch)
6. **Great Lake Swimmers**
A Forest of Arms (Nettwerk)
7. **Romi Mayes**
Devil On Both Shoulders (Independent)
8. **Faith Healer**
Cosmic Troubles (Mint)
9. **Sonny Landreth**
Bound By the Blues (Provogue)
10. **James Taylor**
Before This World (Concord)
11. **Eilen Jewell**
Sundown Over Ghost Town (Signature Sounds)
12. **Josh Rouse**
The Embers Of Time (Yep Roc)
13. **The Weather Station**
Loyalty (Outside Music)
14. **Leonard Cohen**
Can't Forget (Columbia)
15. **Mike Edel**
India, Seattle (Cordova Bay)
16. **Lord Huron**
Strange Trails (I Am Sound Records)
17. **Richard Thompson**
Still (Fantasy)
18. **Amy Helm**
Didn't It Rain (eOne)
19. **Dawes**
All Your Favorite Bands (Hub Records)
20. **Gypsophilia**
Night Swimming (Forward Music Group)

Based on the most-played folk, roots and world music dics on CKUA
radio - www.ckua.org - throughout May, June and July, 2015.



Dawes

SWANSONGS



B.B. King

B.B. King, the unrivalled ambassador of the blues, died May 14 at his home in Las Vegas after a series of small strokes attributed to his diabetes. He was 89.

The humble superstar, who grew from poverty in the Mississippi Delta to universal acclaim, was widely considered the single most influential post-Second World War electric guitarist. Eric Clapton, Otis Rush, Buddy Guy, Jimi Hendrix, John Mayall, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and Keith Richards are just some of the many musicians inspired by King.

Throughout a career that spanned 65-odd years, the self-described King of the Blues received 15 Grammy Awards and collaborated with the likes of U2, Eric Clapton, Stevie Wonder, Carol King, and The Rolling Stones.

Riley B. King—the B didn't stand for anything, apparently—was born Sept. 16, 1925, to sharecroppers Albert and Nora Ella King on a plantation called Berclair, outside the small

town of Itta Bena, MS. His mother left when he was four and his father disappeared soon after.

Raised by his grandmother, Elnora Farr, at nearby Kilmichael, his formative years were mired in poverty. Respite came in the form of singing in the choir at Elkhorn Baptist Church. The minister there led worship with a Sears-Roebuck Silvertone guitar. He taught King his first three chords. His cousin, the noted country bluesman Bukka White, would teach him so much more.

In November 1941, radio station KFFA out of Helena, AK, began broadcasting *King Biscuit Time*—a show that first featured the Mississippi Delta blues performed live by harmonica player and host Rice Miller, better known as Sonny Boy Williamson II. Riley King heard Williamson's broadcasts and set his mind on a similar vocation.

By 1946, he had followed Bukka White to Memphis, and while it took another two years to finally settle there, his first big break came in 1948 when he performed for Sonny Boy Williams II's, new show on KWEM in West Memphis. That appearance led to steady local bookings, and later to a 10-minute spot

on WDIA in Memphis. King needed a catchy radio name and what started out as Beale Street Blues Boy was shortened to Blues Boy King, and finally B.B. King.

The following year, King recorded his first four tracks for Bullet Records, then signed a contract with Los Angeles-based RPM Records. Throughout the next couple of years he cut numerous tracks for RPM, which were often produced by Sam Phillips, who would go on to establish the legendary Sun Studios.

King's first national success came in 1951 with the release of *Three O'Clock Blues*. It topped the R&B charts and stayed there for 15 weeks. He scored a further 20 hits over the next decade with the likes of *You Know I Love You* (1952), *Please Love Me* (1953), *Whole Lotta Love* (1954), *Everyday I Get The Blues* (1955).

By the early '60s, young black audiences had abandoned blues for rock'n'roll and soul and King's popularity began to wane. In 1964, though, he recorded the seminal *B.B. King Live At The Regal*. Paying tribute to King in May, Eric Clapton posted on the Internet: "If you're not familiar with his work I would encourage you to go out and find an album called *B.B. King Live at the Regal*, which is where it all really started for me as a young player." It won a Grammy and was later declared an historic sound recording worthy of preservation by the Library of Congress's National Recording Registry.

White American audiences began to discover the blues in the mid-'60s, ironically through British bands such as The Rolling Stones, Fleetwood Mac, and The Yardbirds. Opening for the Stones, and performing at rock venues such as the Fillmore's East and West, pushed King's profile forward. Finally, across-the-board recognition arrived in 1969 with the release of the violin-drenched *The Thrill Is Gone*. It made it into the upper reaches of the pop charts.

And he continued to score chart successes throughout the '70s. Befriended by the Irish band U2, King appeared on their live album *Rattle And Hum* (1988) and dueted on the hit single *Love Comes To Town*.

King was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame in 1984, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987, and received the Songwriters Hall of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award in 1990. He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush and sang Robert Johnson's *Sweet Home Chicago* with President Barack Obama.

His final Grammy came in 2009 for best blues album for *One Kind Favor*.

— Roddy Campbell

Bob Johnson

Produced Landmark Recordings

Born 1932

Renowned producer Bob Johnson, who oversaw the recording of seminal LPs by the likes of Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, Leonard Cohen, and Simon and Garfunkel, died Aug. 14 in a hospice near Nashville of undisclosed causes. He was 83.

Donald William (Bob) Johnston was born in Hillsboro, TX, on May 14, 1932, and grew up in Fort Worth in a musical family. His mother, Diane Johnson, wrote numerous songs for Gene Autry and scored a hit in 1976 with *Miles And Miles of Texas* recorded by Asleep At The Wheel.

After a period in the U.S. Navy, Bob recorded several rockabilly singles, moved into production work at Kapp Records, then joined the staff at Columbia Records in New York in 1964. Meanwhile, he wrote songs for Bill Hailey and The Comets and Elvis Presley.

In New York, Johnson produced Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965) and *Blonde On Blonde* (1966), widely considered as one of the greatest albums ever made. Clearly on a roll, Johnson oversaw Simon and Garfunkel's *Sounds of Silence* (1966) and *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* (1966), as well as Leonard Cohen's *Songs from a Room* (1969) and *Songs of Love and Hate* (1971). Johnson would also tour and perform with Cohen.

When Columbia's executives repeatedly rejected Johnny Cash's idea to record a live album in Folsom State Prison, Johnson leant his support. The subsequent album, *At Folsom Prison* (1968), sold in excess of three million copies and revitalized Cash's career.

Columbia promoted Johnson to run their

studio in Nashville. And he brought Dylan there to make *John Wesley Harding* (1967) and *Nashville Skyline* (1969). In all, they made six albums together, including the vilified *Self Portrait* (1970).

A financial dispute over royalties saw Johnson leave Columbia to become a freelance producer. His diverse credits over the years would include Willie Nelson, Lindisfarne, Flatt & Scruggs, Pete Seeger, The Waterboys, Jimmy Cliff, Carl Perkins, and George Harrison.

In his 2004 memoir, *Chronicles: Volume 1*, Bob Dylan wrote: "[Bob] Johnson had fire in his eyes. He had that thing that some people call 'momentum'. You could see it in his face and he shared that fire. Columbia's leading folk and country producer, he was born 100 years too late. He should have been wearing a wide cape, a plumed hat and riding with his sword held high."

— Roddy Campbell



Jean Ritchie

The Queen of Appalachian Song

Born 1922

Name anyone to match the influence and natural-born scholarship of Jean Ritchie, who died on June 1, 2015, in Berea, Madison County, KY. Born in Viper, Perry County, KY, on Dec. 8, 1922, she wrote in *Singing Family of the Cumberlands* (OUP, 1955) about arriving the last of 14—four boys—born to Abigail (née Hall) and Balis Ritchie.

Her autobiography, essential reading for anyone interested in folk music, explains her growing up steeped in Appalachian folk ways. After graduating from Cumberland College in Williamsburg in 1943, in 1946 she earned her bachelor of arts in social work from the University of Kentucky. That year Delaware's Co-operative Recreational Society published *Songs of All Time* with the Ritchies providing the motherlode. Songbooks were vital. One inclusion was the alternative reality *Nottamun Town*. It went into the repertoires of, amongst others, Shirley Collins & Davey Graham and Bert Jansch; Dylan reharnessed its melody for *Masters of War* (subsequently an out-of-court settlement).

After teaching in Perry County, Manhattan's Henry Street Settlement—a progressive social services agency—employed her between 1947 and 1949. Nature, nurture, and academia shaped what she became. Recipient of a Fulbright scholarship during 1952 and 1953, she researched the roots of the family's songs in Scotland, Ireland, and England, with her husband George Pickow (1922-2010) documenting

the visual.

The breadth of the family's familiarity with folksong and folk tales was extraordinary and the New York folk cognoscenti recognized Ritchie and her range of traditional songs, lullabies, ballads, and Baptist hymnody as sensational. Furthermore, she popularized the elongated, hourglass-shaped mountain dulcimer, an instrument that Shirley Collins, Joni Mitchell, and Wendy Waldman took to other stages. As a song carrier, writer of original songs in traditional idioms, performer-academic and influence, Jean Ritchie sits in the highest pantheon imaginable.

— Ken Hunt

Packie Byrne

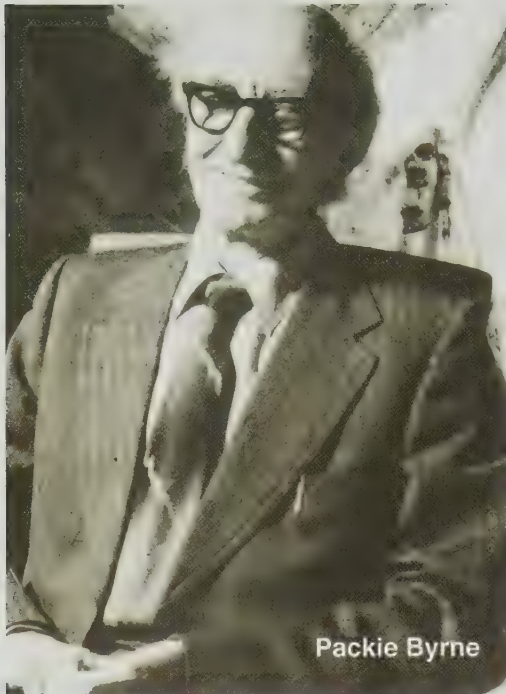
Doyen of the Irish Folk Scene

Born 1917

The England-based Irish folksinger and tin whistle player Packie Manus Byrne died on May 12. In *Recollections of a Donegal Man* (Roger Millington, Lampeter, Wales, 1989), compiled and edited by Stephen Jones, his background was laid out: "The story begins in 1917, in Donegal, a county in the extreme northwest of Ireland that is celebrated for its vigorous folk culture and the spectacular rugged beauty of its mountains and coastline. In the parish of Killybegs, 10 miles or so inland from that picturesque fishing port, lies the townland of Cockermore." Remote and isolated, it had a sprinkle of 11 small farms or crofts, in one of which Byrne was born the youngest of four to Connell and Maria Byrnes,



Bob Johnson

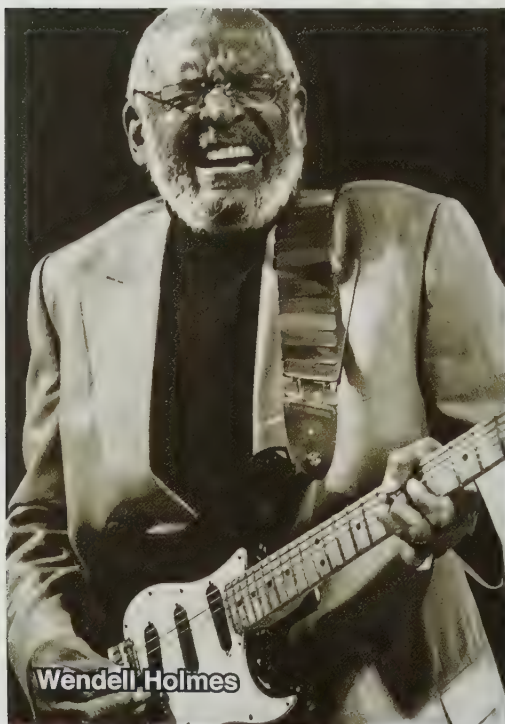


Packie Byrne

he arrived on Feb. 18 that year.

Co. Donegal-raised, there he picked up a huge repertoire of folk items, be they tunes, songs, or tales. Like many of his generation, by age 20 he was part of the exodus to find work in England, where he also put his musical intuition to good effect gaining work in swing bands as a saxophonist. Illustrative of his folk ‘credentials’, he recorded for the English Folk Dance and Song label solo and with Bonnie Shaljean on *The Half Door* (1977) while Topic released his *Songs of a Donegal Man* (1975) and featured him on its *The Voice of the People* mega-series. Along the way he even acted in Ken Loach’s film *Black Jack* (1979). A musician to the manner born.

– Ken Hunt



Wendell Holmes

Wendell Holmes

The Holmes Brothers Founder

Born 1943

Tragedy has struck The Holmes Brothers for the second time in 2015. In January, the gospel-blues-roots trio lost drummer and multi-octave vocalist Willie (Popsy) Dixon. For his obituary, see *Penguin Eggs* No. 65. Then on June 19, vocalist, guitarist, pianist, and songwriter Wendell Holmes died at his home in Rosedale, MD, of complications due to pulmonary hypertension. He was 71.

Holmes was born Dec. 19, 1943, and he and his brother, Sherman, were raised in Christchurch, VA. Their schoolteacher parents nurtured the boys’ early interest in music through traditional Baptist hymns, spirituals, and the blues of Jimmy Reed, Junior Parker, and B.B. King.

As they developed as musicians they would play a fusion of blues, soul, country, and rock at their cousin’s local club, Herman Wate’s Juke Joint. “When he couldn’t get any good groups to come from Norfolk or Richmond, he’d call us in,” Wendell told *American Blues Scene*. “That’s how we honed our sound. We used to say we’d rock ’em on Saturday and save ’em on Sunday.”

When Sherman left for New York City, Wendell soon followed. And he would tour with the R&B brother-and-sister act Inez and Charlie Foxx, best known for their hit *Mockingbird* (1963). The brothers formed The Sevvilles and opened for the likes of John Lee Hooker and The Impressions.

Playing at the Dan Lynch Blues Bar in New York City one night in 1967, Willie (Popsy) Dixon sat in for a couple of songs. They blended instantly and Popsy became ‘the third brother’. However, it took until 1989 before The Holmes Brothers signed with Rounder Records and released their debut album, *In The Spirit* (1990), to universal praise. It featured Texas musician Gib Wharton on pedal steel, lap steel, and Dobro, which added a saintly country feel to their already distinctive soulful sound.

Peter Gabriel signed The Holmes Brothers to his label, Real World Records, in 1992 and invited them to his studio near Bath, England, to record the traditional gospel album *Jubilation*. They also contributed to the album *A Week or Two in the Real World* (1994), which featured them performing *That’s Where It’s At* with Van Morrison. They would also write the complete soundtrack and star in the lauded film *Lotto Land* (1995). In all, The Holmes Brothers released a dozen albums.

– Roddy Campbell



Flora MacNeil

Flora MacNeil

Foremost Scots Gaelic Singer

Born 1928

In modern times the Scots Gaelic folk tradition has had few proponents to compare with “the regal, angel-voiced Flora MacNeil” (Donny O’Rourke, *Glasgow Herald*, 1988). Her singing had charm and an eloquence given to few. She was born on Oct. 6, 1928, on Barra, in Scotland’s Outer Hebrides.

In a pre-radio and television age, she learned the local folkways from her mother and aunt, Annie and Mary Gillies, respectively; her father, Seumas, died when she was a teenager. Windswept with pockets of yellow flags—wild iris—in the dips and birdcall of all kinds, it was a remote outpost of Scottish Celtic culture.

In 1948, she moved to Edinburgh to work for the Post Office. There the great Scot’s poets Hugh MacDiarmid, Sorley MacLean and Hamish Henderson, greeted her with open arms. She sang, most notably, at the post-war celebrations of Festival of Britain and the Edinburgh People’s Festival in 1951. She came to the attention of Alan Lomax through Hamish Henderson – the U.S. and Scottish equivalents of each other. Although she appeared on two volumes—*Courtship* and *Sailors and Servingmaids*—of the Caedmon/Topic 10-LP *Folk Songs of Britain* series, and broadcast early for the BBC (even before Jeannie Robertson) she recorded relatively little but did put out *Craobh nan Ubhal* (1976) and *Orain Floraidh* (2000), for Robin Morton’s Temple Records. Both Karen Matheson of Capercaillie and Julie Fowlis list MacNeil as a major influence on their singing.

In 1992, she was awarded an MBE (short for Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) for her services to Gaelic music. She was inducted into the Scottish Traditional Music Hall of Fame in 2005. She died on May 15, aged 86, in Glasgow.

– Ken Hunt



Lennie Gallant

From virtually the beginning of his career, Lennie Gallant has written songs about Prince Edward Island. He has chronicled the lives of those who made their living working the Island's rich, red-soil and harvesting the bounty of the sea. He has sung about the caring nature and compassion of people who live in small rural communities such as the Rustico he grew up in. And he has celebrated the historic relationship between the Acadian community and the people of the Mi'kmaq Nation.

For years, people have suggested to Gallant develop a showcase to bring together many of the songs he's crafted about P.E.I.

That has come to pass with the creation of *Searching for Abegweit – The Island Songs & Stories of Lennie Gallant*, a runaway musical hit at last year's Charlottetown Festival that sold out all 57 performances.

The show returned again this season with some new Island stories and a lot more visual images, playing to sold-out houses three nights a week at the P.E.I. Brewing Company.

– Doug Gallant

Where did the idea for *Searching for Abegweit* come from?

Over the course of my career and through various projects I've amassed a lot of songs about the Island. My history on the Island runs deep and it had been on my mind for some time that I should gather these songs under one umbrella. I floated the idea to the Charlottetown Festival and got a call from Wade Lynch (the festival's former associate artistic director).

How daunting was it for you to pick and choose the songs that would ultimately make it into the show?

It was very hard. There were so many songs that I wanted to use. Trying to figure out which ones to put in and which ones to leave out was difficult.

Some songs, just had to be there.

There were some very obvious ones, the stuff of legend like *Tale of The Phantom Ship*, as well as the *Nellie J. Banks*, *Peter's Dream* and *Island Clay*. One of the hardest thing, I guess, was leaving out some of the other songs that people always ask for in my shows, like *Pieces of You* and *Meet Me At The Oasis*, because I wanted to stick to the theme, the Island connection.

But sticking to that theme still meant you had more songs than you could use?

But as Jac Gautreau [the show's director] would say, that's a nice problem to have.

While many of the songs in the show were drawn from older recordings in your catalogue you also added some new material.

We used six new songs written specifically for the show, songs like *Searching for Abegweit* and *Lord Selkirk's Land* that we felt gave the show more cohesiveness and context. They feel like they belong there. They fit in well with some of the oldest songs in the show, songs like *Island Clay* and *Going Back to Rustico*.

Did you consider adding new songs this year?

There were a couple of songs I wanted to put into the show that we didn't use last year. Then I realized that for every new song I put in, something else had to come out.

The show has a very strong visual component, using hundreds of paintings by your sister Karen, an acclaimed visual artist. How did that come about?

My sister Karen's work and my Island-based songs seem to complement each other extremely well. I'd always wanted to do a project with her. When I approached her about using her paintings of P.E.I. in this show she was very much in favour of it.

You've also collaborated on a book together. Which came first?

The book was published at the same time we launched the show. We had talked for a long time about putting the book together. Getting the show was the push we needed to do the book. So we took 52 of her paintings and 52 of my songs and put them together.

It's been well received?

We've sold out the first printing and are halfway through the second.

Does the show have a future after this run?

Impresarios have spoken to me about touring the show. Last year we had a big, heavy screen, all in sections. Awkward to tour. But we've consolidated things and made changes that would enable us to use any screen anywhere. It's easy to travel now. We're also in the process of recording the soundtrack. We did some mixes last year and I was happy with them. But this year it's so much stronger with new arrangements I really like.

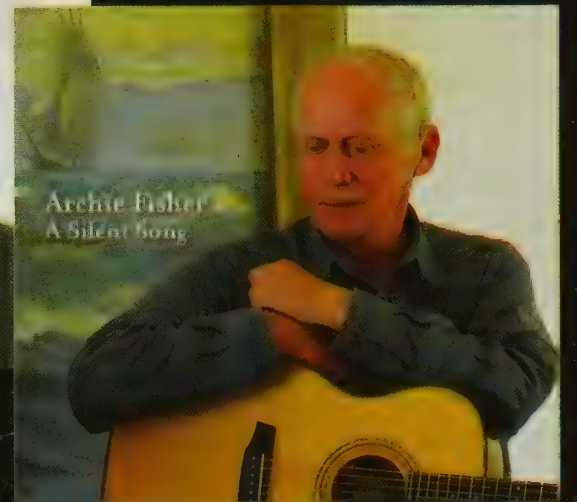
Have you learned anything about yourself from doing the show?

Gathering these songs and matching them up with Karen's paintings brought home to me how much the Island means to me. It's one of the most beautiful places on the planet and I love it dearly.

www.lenniegallant.com.

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Wide Cut Weekend, a new roots music festival, makes its debut in numerous intimate Calgary venues Oct. 15-17. And artistic director Allison Brock has drawn exclusively from a rich litany of Alberta's accomplished roots performers to fill its first bill. Brock hosts the popular Wide Cut Country on the province's CKUA Radio network, which features as broad a spectrum of country music as its name implies. The show also gave the festival its initial musical focus.

— Roddy Campbell

What inspired you to create this festival?

Three other gals: Jen Kuhlwein, Alanna Martineau, and Gillian Turnbull. I had been trying to do Wide Cut presents for a few years and the three of them accosted me in the green room at the [2014] Calgary folk festival. They said they wanted to do a roots festival and would I be the artistic director? I said, 'Yes'. And that was it. It was something we were all thinking about and wanting to do for a long time. It just took the right moment and the right time.

What's the hardest aspect of starting a festival from scratch?

Building the energy and momentum to keep going because it feels like you don't get anywhere for so long. And then finally you hit these break points and you suddenly realize, 'Wow! We actually got a lot done. We're going to be OK'.

How big is your budget?

It's not huge by any stretch of the imagination. We're looking at 20 to a maximum of 25 artists. We're going to pay the acts fairly but we can't jump into the lavish pay scale of the major music festivals at this point. We're a pretty small, lean machine.

None of us are drawing any kind of salary. All the board members, and everybody involved, has been volunteering. Everybody's coming at it, total passion for the music, for the city and for the province. Nobody's making a dime here. We're doing it out of the love and belief that this can mean something and can be something.

Most Canadian festivals run in the summer, yet you're running in the fall; why so?

We just didn't think we wanted to compete. There's so much that happens, in particular in Alberta, starting in June, right through, basi-



A
Quick
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With

Allison Brock

cally, to the beginning of September. There is something on every single weekend. We didn't want to get into the fray of all of that. So we thought, there's nothing going on from a roots music standpoint. Obviously, the folk clubs have their seasons but that's not super busy traffic. And so we thought the best thing that we could do was hit that late fall time frame because it's before the holidays, it's before the weather gets really crappy so that people can move around the city easily.

You are using a number of venues around Calgary, is there a festival pass?

We are doing a wrist band. You can do the wrist band for the weekend for \$49. Or you can do it for Friday for \$25 or just the Saturday for \$30. You will need a wrist band to get into the events.

Do you see this event spreading to surrounding towns or do you see it as being solely Calgary-based?

Dave McCann, who is based in Lethbridge, asked if he could do a satellite festival in Lethbridge at the same time. Our response was, 'Yes, but not this year'. That is our dream, actually, to have satellite festivals running in numerous locations across the province. We think that energy would be amazing. To think that we might be able to have other events on at the same time in other cities in the province, I just think that to unite the province that way would be wonderful.

All the acts you've booked for this festival are Alberta-based; is that due to financial considerations?

Yes and no. This first year, there's only one grant we're able to apply for. We still don't know of the outcome. So we had to go ahead and operate on a ticket-based budget. First year out we didn't want to be dealing with huge transportation costs and having to put numerous artists up in hotels—all those things. We just wanted to keep it really simple. And, at the end of the day, my artistic vision—we have so much talent in this province—why don't we showcase that? Bring in all this amazing talent and put on a show. We are so blessed with the amount of talent we have here. So beyond the budget, that became one of the pillars of what we want to try and do with this festival.

How do you see this event evolving?

As we previously touched on, to increase the amount of communities that are involved would be absolutely be one of the areas. And we will look at down the road, bringing in artists from outside the Alberta borders, there's no question. We did talk about the possibility of having honorary Albertans (she laughs). We'll expand in all ways as the growth happens naturally. So we'll go beyond Alberta but we'll always keep Alberta artists at the heart of it.

When do the tickets go on sale?

Right after the media launch in Calgary, September 8.

Introducing Lucas Chaisson



The singer/songwriter genre is rife with young artists longing about being in and out of love. But the uncommon maturity and craftsmanship of Lucas Chaisson, just 21, makes his latest release *Telling Time* stick out from the crowd.

"I don't have a lot of life experience to draw from yet," he admits, "so I have to make sure that my songs are well written. This is the first record that sounds the way I first heard it in my mind."

It doesn't hurt that Chaisson focused on guitar and writing songs for most of a decade. Then there's the role that award-winning roots music veteran Colin Linden played as producer and complimentary string player with a team of pros who came to Nashville's House Of Blues studio in mid-2014.

Linden was a family friend through business ties to Chaisson's mother and had served as a sounding board on the singer's career for a few years already before they agreed to work together.

"I was hugely intimidated until I got down to Nashville and we spent a couple of days together before the studio. I think the album is a nice marriage of my songs and the way he thinks about music. Everything was about serving the song. Almost everything was recorded live off the floor like a jam session with the best musicians I've ever played with. Everyone was very invested in the project. I was having the time of my life."

Bassist John Dymond and drummer Gary Craig were Toronto colleagues of Linden's going back 30 years or more. Session players sat in on Hammond organ, pedal steel, and fiddle and one backing vocal with Linden's (Blackie And The Rodeo Kings) pal Stephen Fearing was recorded later in Halifax for the tune *Stories*. While electric instruments were used (on *Lowden Proud*) the disc has an inviting, acoustic warmth.

The dozen songs on *Telling Time* came from about twice as many tunes he had sent to Linden in the months leading up to recording, including one number by friend Wyatt Easterling.

"It was the first time I ever cut songs for a record but I think they all fit a kind of story for the album we wanted to make."

Only a few songs are truly autobiographical: the arresting *My Lover And My Ghost*, his memory-laden *Boys* written for a late friend, and the closing *Take It Easy On Me*. Two others, *Losing Game* and his hockey-themed story *The Kid* hint at an observer's role the tunesmith wants to explore more in the future.

Raised in Cochrane, AB, Chaisson has thrived in Edmonton's musical community for several years now. He credits his earliest inspirations to the varied programming of public radio, artists such as Lucinda Williams and Guy Clark. He was a regular at Calgary and Canmore folk fests and his discovery of blues artists such as Reverend Gary Davis had a big impact.

fooling around on guitar from age three, he took classical guitar lessons to level four at the Royal Conservatory. Moving on to a wider repertoire in his teens, Chaisson played open stages and busked on street corners, but you can still hear classical training in his articulation and confidence.

His debut EP was recorded largely around a crackling fire before he made his first full-length set *Growing Pains* at 17, picking up a Canadian Folk Music Award for Young Performer of the Year in 2012. He says he only came to appreciate the mechanics of songwriting since he made it a daily discipline to write and study songwriters and poets. *Telling Time* also picked up a 2015 WCMA nomination so it seems to be paying off.

— By Roger Levesque





Introducing The Young Novelists

They met as students at the University of Waterloo, when she was painting a theatre set and he was in dress rehearsals as Elvis Presley. Both did a double take. “*Twice I looked and twice I saw you,*” they harmonize in their ballad *Standing Still*.

Graydon James and Laura Spink are married now with a four-year-old son, and when they perform as The Young Novelists—sometimes with a band and sometimes as a duo—they often chat about their courting days and family life. They make an appealing couple. He wears plaid shirts and jeans, she wears dresses. They tell stories together and make frequent eye contact, and their songs are often up-tempo numbers that evoke the 1970s sounds of Fleetwood Mac, and Crosby, Stills and Nash, with pleasing harmonies and lush guitar work. It comes as a surprise, then, that some lyrics on their latest album, *Made Us Strangers*, tell of darkly troubled love.

“*There’s a slight despair in your voice at the end of the line / all the empires carefully built are in decline,*” they sing in *Name Your Price*.

“*We could not be any worse for each other,*” they sing in *Couldn’t Be Any Worse*.

The explanation is that, as a songwriter, James combines personal experience with vicarious emotions and reworks them like a fiction writer. “I talk to my friends about their relationships,” he says, “and while I don’t specifically seek to mine those stories for dramatic song lyrics, sometimes they make their way in.” The line about despair, he says dryly, comes from a friend’s relationship to the music industry.

James and Spink met in 1999, got married in 2005, and began their musical relationship in 2009 in Toronto when James started adding band members to his solo folk-rock act. At first, Spink wanted to stand in a corner at the back. “I loved the fact that I got to sing in a band and sing harmonies,” she says, “but I didn’t like the part about people watching.”

Gradually, her vocal talent demanded that she share centre stage, while the rest of the band matured into a more integrated ensemble. The group became Graydon James & the Young Novelists, their logo a vintage typewriter. In 2012, when they launched their first full-length studio album, *In the Year You Were Born*, James also launched his first novel, *The Mall of Small Frustrations*.

The past year has brought a new direction. Spink kept her job as a hydrogeologist at the Ontario environment ministry but James quit his as a letter carrier and worked out a strategy to break into the United States. “The biggest hurdle is the paperwork,” he says. He cracked the P2 visa application for entertainers, and worked out arrangements with the American Federation of Musicians and U.S. Homeland Security. Now as The Young Novelists, they still play Canadian dates, and still play with regular band members, but more and more they perform as a duo anywhere from Illinois to Massachusetts to South Carolina, sharing themselves openly with audiences.

– By John Goddard



Introducing Same Latitude As Rome



While Canadians often identify as northern people, the band called Same Latitude as Rome reminds us that we share something with Italians besides a fondness for good coffee. Port Pelee is Canada's most southern location and is, indeed, at the same latitude as Rome. Port Pelee is also the area in which the band, Same Latitude as Rome, got its start ten years and five albums ago.

Early Days, the band's 2015 release, tells stories about Canadians who were lawless, adventurous, innovative, heroic and even deadly. The album's lead track honours early Canadians, *a national inheritance to each of us they gave, so here's to those who struggled, in the early days*". This is the band's second historical CD, following *1812*, written in commemoration of the war of 1812.

While the band's membership is fluid, songwriter and lead vocalist Peter Boyer and vocalist Anneke McCabe are the constants. McCabe sings in Same Latitude as Rome, but outside the band she's a multi-instrumentalist and band director. When he's not on the road with Carol Baker, JK Gulley, another multi-instrumentalist and *Early Days* producer, joins the band. Peter Sisk (bass) is a member of The Good Brothers but also sits in with Boyer and company when able.

Boyer is a great fan of folklorist Edith Fowke's legacy to Canadian folk music, but while going through Fowke's catalogues, Boyer noticed that a number of major Canadian events hadn't been captured in song; so he decided to write some of his own. "Canada's a new country, relatively speaking," says Boyer, "and I guess everyone in the early days was struggling too hard to survive to think much about the great oral tradition of folk music. There wasn't a songwriter around in the day to write about Thomas D'Arcy McGee...There are so many stories waiting to be told."

Same Latitude as Rome, following in the great oral tradition, tells stories about the cattle-rustling, murderous McLean boys – hunted by a posse of 70 armed but patient men, and the hanging of Patrick Fitzgerald, falsely accused of an assault in Bullock's Tavern (they say Fitzgerald's ghost haunts the Amherstburg, Ont., tavern to this day). *Union Man*, *The Ghost of Bullock's Tavern* and *Song for Louis Riel* have garnered numerous song-writing awards. *The Great Rendezvous Polka*, an instrumental co-written by Boyer and violinist Besnik Yzeiri, is a festive tribute to voyageurs, aboriginal guides, and traders doing business in Fort William, Thunder Bay in the early 1800s.

Boiling a complex historical event down to four minutes in an entertaining way is a challenge, Boyer says. He hopes that if he captures people's interest with a song, they might Google the subject to learn more. "The thing about historical song writing is that if it's good, it really does stand the test of time and that's appealing to an artist...That's the ultimate payback. That's what you want".

Look for Boyer's piece, *Canadian History in Song*, in the *Canadian Historical Association Bulletin*, August 2015.

– By Jackie Bell



Same Latitude As Rome: Peter Boyer, third from left



Introducing Adrian Nation

Adrian Nation adores Canada. Not, as we speak, that he's ever been. But that's about to change... and to say Adrian is excited is something of an understatement. "It's my dream destination," he's saying, "I've always been drawn to Canadian musicians for some reason. Bruce Cockburn is one of my biggest influences. And, of course, Neil Young and Gordon Lightfoot and Leonard Cohen..."

From Essex in England, he is, rather bafflingly, not too well known in his home land—perhaps the consequence of creating an individual, largely unclassifiable sound that slips somewhere between the cracks of folk, rock, and blues and supposedly deems him an unsuitable fit for any conventional scene or market—and for years he's had to juggle gigging with his work as a self-employed builder.

Enter Canada to the rescue. Championed by Alberta's CKUA Radio host Andy Donnelly, his third album *Live At Crossroads* has turned a few heads, including those on this magazine, which pronounced it one of the top 10 albums of 2014. A November tour of Alberta is the happy upshot and the affable Nation is ecstatic.

"I'm so excited about the Canadian tour and I'm very grateful to Andy Donnelly for creating the opportunity. I do play all over the U.K. and I've done quite a lot in the Netherlands, but it's been a struggle to get on to any circuit, maybe because I don't fit into a particular genre. One year I played at both the Cambridge Folk and Cambridge Rock Festivals and got great reactions at both but it didn't seem to lead anywhere. Maybe it's because my music is a bit different...I don't hear many other people playing guitar the way I do."

He first learned to play at 16 and his biggest influence in terms of guitar was the late Isaac Guillory.

"He just blew me away. I'd never heard anything like him before. I listened to him with all the harmonics and thought, 'Where the hell is all that noise coming from?'. He was only 53 when he died in 2000, it was very sad. I also listened a lot to Mark Knopfler—he's been a big influence melodically, especially the way the melodies differentiate from the lyric."

Adrian's late development may in part be due to his own self-doubts, perhaps inevitable when you establish Isaac Guillory and Bruce Cockburn as your benchmark. "They did set the bar really high so I spent a long time keeping my music to myself. I still measure everything by their standards—when I play I want people to feel the way I do when I hear a Bruce Cockburn song."

He describes his first album, *Sowing Seeds*, as "a steep learning curve but a decent album"; while his second album *Fall Or Fly* in 2009—an ambitious effort produced by Chris West of Go West and Manfred Mann's Earthband fame—involved contributions from Fairport Convention's Gerry Conway, Nashville-based guitarist Colin Linden, and celebrated piper Troy Donockley, among others. It won him plenty of airplay and a growing reputation as an outstanding songwriter, and while his exciting, innovative guitar technique is self-evident, he'd like to be recognized most for the songwriting.

"I like to write about real situations," he says. "I didn't start until I was in my late 20s and it has taken me years to get to this point but now I make notes on the road and have notebooks full of stuff. I'm writing more political material about things I see in the world around me."

As an example, one of his current big songs, called *The Dying Of Democracy*, is based on being caught up in a riot in Athens.

"My songs are usually rooted in something real rather than imaginary. And if I can make people stop and think for a while then I've done my job."

— By Colin Irwin



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Introducing *Rise Again*

The creators of a massively popular songbook have issued a sequel, this time with a section of semi-obscure Canadian compositions. Song sleuths Peter Blood and Annie Patterson, a Quaker couple living in Massachusetts, published *Rise Up Singing* in 1988, giving campfire and living-room singing groups a guide to 1,200 folk songs, with lyrics and chords. Most are American standards, with contributions from a few such Canadians as Gordon Lightfoot and Buffy Sainte-Marie. It sold one million copies. This time, folk music lover Jack Cole of Kitchener, ON, persuaded the couple to include dozens of Canadian works. “Ninety per cent they never heard of,” he says.

Cole first came across *Rise Up Singing* in the early 1990s and decided to buy it if it included *The Broom O’ The Cowdenknowes*, a Scottish ballad first published in 1651. He found it on page three. When he started the Old Chestnuts Song Circle in his living room in 1995 he also recommended the book to other members. After 20 years they still use it.

“The book became the Bible for a lot of song-singing groups,” he says. “[The late NDP leader] Jack Layton used to carry a box of them on his plane and hand them out to reporters for sing-alongs.”

Cole registered the Old Chestnuts with an online song-circle directory that Blood and Patterson established, and in 2012 got an invitation to make suggestions for a songbook sequel of the same size, *Rise Again*. Spotting a chance to raise Canadian content, he solicited nominations from friends, held workshops, compiled lists, culled ruthlessly, and submitted 64 songs; 32 made the cut. Several participants sent separate recommendations, bringing the total to about 50, with subjects including Laura Secord, Louis Riel, and Frobisher Bay.

“Jack (Cole) gets a lot of credit for Canadianizing the book,” Blood says.

James Keelaghan appears with *Hillcrest Mine*, Ron Hynes with *Sonny’s Dream*, and Ruth Moody with *Glo-ry Bound*. Catherine Wheatley shows up twice for *Some Sweet Country* and *Hallelujah*, not to be confused with the Leonard Cohen song of the same name, also included. Eileen McGann of Vancouver Island has the most with *Bless This House*, *Here’s To The Men*, and *Wisdom Guide Me*.

In an era of smartphones and tablets, a songbook still serves a purpose, says Cole, who also teaches mathematics and computer science at Conestoga College. Songs such as *Barbara Allen* or *Wildwood Flower* might be known by many versions but a songbook gives everybody the same verses, in the same order, in the same key. Chords are shown, giving guitar, banjo, and mandolin players easy cues, and harmony singers a quick way to find their note. Indexes organize the songs by themes. “If somebody says, ‘Tonight we are singing about rivers,’ there is a section about seas and rivers,” Cole says. Anybody unfamiliar with a melody can go to YouTube or an artist’s website. “We tell you where you can find it,” Patterson says.

Rise Again is due out this fall. Toronto folksinger EveGolberg, included for *Old Tin Cup*, is organizing a Canadian launch concert next spring.

– By John Goddard



Jack Cole: centre



Frank Turner

Joe Strummer inspired an exceptionally angry young man to become an acoustic superstar.

By Colin Irwin

Onstage, Frank Turner is a force of nature, shell-shocking audiences in a hurricane of words, opinion, guitar thrash, cusses, booming choruses, and no-holds-barred personal revelations with his heart not so much on his sleeve as emblazoned on his forehead. Offstage, Frank Turner is...well, much the same, really.

A tall, lean, animated, dazzlingly articulate character with a big, all-enveloping smile, infectiously engaging nature and an inbuilt warmth that would disarm his most cynical critic, it's easy to see how, why and wherefore Turner has undergone the unlikely transformation from punk/heavy metal also-ran to solo acoustic superstar.

His mass of tattoos may be scary—there's Iron Maiden on his leg and he's halfway through having a Townes Van Zandt quote

("Everything is not enough and nothing is too much to bear") branded across his back—but Turner is an incessantly talkative and hugely likeable character. A character whose early career was drenched in rage and a seeming lust for excess and likely (self)-destruction.

He's mostly at peace with the world and himself now but he was, he volunteers cheerfully, an exceptionally angry young man. So naturally you ask what he was angry about...

And thus the story unfolds of his scholarship to Eton College, where his fellow pupils included Prince William, and he railed venomously against the stench of privilege and snobbery.

"I come from a middle-class family but that is a whole different ball game that place, it's full of horrible twats. I must temper that—you shouldn't generalize about people but snobbery is repugnant and disgusting to me. And then I discovered The Clash and that was my lifeline out because Joe Strummer went to a similar school and showed it was possible to come through it and not be an asshole. I had an amazing education and a lot of people hate my guts because of it."

Indeed they do—he even received death

threats after an English newspaper falsely saddled him with right-wing tendencies, but is philosophical about the negative effects of his success. "It's really easy being an underground artist because the only people who know about you are people who like you but when you become mainstream you are exposed to a lot of people who don't like you and want to let you know that fact through the medium of Twitter. It gets pretty tiresome but you can't go through life telling people who you are and then complain when they know who you are."

Growing up in a non-musical family who wanted him to be a lawyer, Frank favoured paleontology until he reached the age of 10, heard Iron Maiden and decided to be a guitar god.

"My older sister was into Counting Crows and Soul Asylum and I was into Iron Maiden, Pantera, but Pantera is really hard to play on guitar and Counting Crows is very easy to play on guitar so I learned a lot of their songs so I could play them with my sister and I think that was a good grounding in terms of songwriting."

From Eton he went to the London School of Economics and embarked on a wild and very loud musical adventure fronting the hardcore band Million Dead ("I took my shirt off and

yelled a lot"). They did fine for a while, too, until the wheels spun spectacularly off the wagon while on tour in 2005 ("the details are boring and private but we ceased to be friends and forgot how to be nice to each other") and Turner decided to re-invent himself. Playing acoustic guitar. As a folksinger. Sort of.

"I wanted to do something different and this was very different. Everyone thought I was mad. A lot of people thought I was having some sort of psychotic episode when I started playing acoustic guitar. It was hard. When you're in a hardcore band you can roll around and scream when things go wrong and blame it on the drummer but you can't really do that solo with an acoustic guitar. That would be very avant-garde. So it was very naked playing solo but that felt quite punk to me. You can't hide behind anything. It's just chords and words. It's either a song that engages the audience or doesn't."

Springsteen was another revelation. "I always thought of him as the cheesy American guy in blue jeans and white vest who sang *Born In The U.S.A.* until a friend gave me a copy of *Nebraska*, which taught me you can be heavy without taking your shirt off."

In his 20s, he heard Dylan for the first time. "I think everything up to and including *Highway 61* is utterly incredible but after that it sounded like he was doing an impression of himself, which I find quite annoying."

He suddenly laughs loudly at his own conceit. "Who am I to sit here and criticize Bob Dylan?!"

Because of his shouty nature, razor-sharp wit, and passion for clever couplets, he's compared often to Billy Bragg, although he doesn't often venture near the political Bragg frequently inhabits. He's friends with Bragg and says he's flattered rather than irked by the comparison.

"With Million Dead we spent our whole careers being compared to people we hated so it's nice being compared to someone I like."

He's now made six albums in nine years—including this year's *Positive Songs For Negative People*—which he describes as a record about picking yourself up after falling down; the falling down having been graphically depicted in the 2013 break-up album *Tape Deck Heart*. (His ex-girlfriend wasn't too impressed when she heard painful personal details of her life turned into art and Frank is sorry about that).

"I decided to go hell for leather on the confessional route but there are some things I'm not sure I should have said. I don't wish to damage people with my songs."

He's effusive about songwriters and names Winnipeg's John K Samson from The Weakerthans as one of his favourites, along with Loudon Wainwright ("Road Ode is the best song ever about touring"), John Prine, and Townes Van Zandt.

Turner's first EP was titled *Camp Fire Punk Rock*, which still seems an apt description of the dichotomy of an acoustic guitar and song man with a punk heart who still plays hard rock festivals in tandem with folk events, but he's relaxed about genres. "When I started doing acoustic music I called myself a folksinger and people criticized me, probably rightly, because there is an argument that folk music should be traditional songs and I don't do many of them."

At Cambridge Folk Festival this summer, though, he did play an unaccompanied version of *Barbara Allen* (along with a raucous cover of Queen's *Somebody To Love*) and on the 2011 album *England Keep My Bones*, he included an unaccompanied song, *England's Curse*, styled so closely to traditional form he fooled many people into thinking it was an old folk song (though it was written in his bedroom).

"When I called myself a folksinger it was partly an ideological statement that music is for everyone to engage in as opposed to being difficult and only for people who wear skinny black jeans and Against Me T-shirts. But genre classification isn't my problem. I don't care what they call my music. I just make it..."

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The Weather Station

She made her beautiful, bold new recording near Paris, just don't mention Joni Mitchell.
By Ron Johnson

In 2006, Tamara Lindeman played her first show as The Weather Station at Clinton's Tavern on Bloor Street West in Toronto. It was a neighbourhood bar known more for retro dance parties and pub grub than live music. And it was a fairly easy spot for a young upstart to get a gig, even if her experience included just a few open mic nights with her dad's guitar at Free Times Cafe.

"I had been sort of recording these songs on my computer and posting them to Myspace and a friend of mine said I just had to play a show," she explains over the phone from her Toronto home, just back from playing the very cool Pickathon music festival in Happy Valley, OR. "I was, like, ugh, I don't know how to do that."

But Lindeman did far more than just make it through her first gig.

"I really had my shit together," she says, with

a laugh. "I really worked at it and rehearsed a lot. And to make it really special, when people came through the door, instead of getting stamped, I would give them a flower they could hold and present as proof of entry."

A decade, two EPs and three full-length albums later, Lindeman continues to push herself and explore new sonic territory. And now Lindeman is prepping for another round of gigs. This time it's her first European tour in support of her bold and beautiful new album *Loyalty*—one of the most enchanting folk music releases of the year.

The Weather Station also has its most regular band lineup, and includes Ben Whiteley, Adrian Cook, and Ian Kehoe.

The story of *Loyalty* began while the musician was on tour in France. In the winter of 2014, she was singing backup vocals for good friend and mentor Afie Jurvanen, a.k.a. Bahamas, when they landed in La Frette-sur-Seine, a recording studio located in a rundown 19th century mansion just outside Paris.

In a very serendipitous way, she was offered the opportunity to record her third album with Jurvanen and Robbie Lackritz, who produced Feist's record *The Reminder* in the same space.

"I'm really lucky to have Afie as mentor in my life," she explains. "He said, 'Let's make a record for you,' and I said yes. It had such a special feeling, so I had to seize the opportunity and make the most of it."

The result is the work of an artist in full command of her craft. In a way, being thrust into La Frette allowed the young singer to put aside any reservations that had been haunting her and just go for it.

"What really made the difference for me was that I was so far from home so there was no reason or time to second guess or be unconfident," says Lindeman. "You allow yourself the luxury of being sort of ballsy, I guess. Some people say (the album) is quiet but to me it's not quiet at all. It's very ballsy."

On *Loyalty*, Lindeman presents a series of emotional vignettes conveyed through songwriting that is both honest and precise.

Jurvanen, whose career has taken off over the past few years since signing on to Jack Johnson's Brushfire Music record label, is effusive when talking of the breadth of Lindeman's skill.

"Tamara is the most talented songwriter I know," says Jurvanen. "She can write a song

out of nothing, a moment, an instance, and it'll have weight and substance and meaning. It's both inspiring and terrifying. She's amazing."

But some things have changed. Early in her career, she was dead set against being that girl with the acoustic guitar and the coffee house folk sound and the inevitable Joni Mitchell comparisons that would (and have) surely followed.

"I was like, 'I'm a producer, I record music, that's what I do!,'" she says. "I didn't want to be that girl with the acoustic and the stigma that comes with that."

Despite her best intentions and her early interest in more niche instrumentation such as the banjo and slide guitar, she couldn't avoid the Mitchell comparisons, which began anew with *Loyalty*. Partly at least, because there is some truth to them. She has a beautiful, wide-ranging voice full of dynamics and emotion just like Mitchell.

"I always have that chip on my shoulder about it," says Lindeman, although her position has softened in recent years. "I definitely feel there are certain words people don't use to describe male musicians, even ones who are even more delicate and pretty than I am. And sometimes that bothers me a bit."

She cites songwriters such as Gene Clark (*Set You Free This Time*, *Where My Love Lies Asleep*) and Tim Hardin (*If I Were a Carpenter*, *Reason To Believe*) as artists with whom she shares a similar songwriting style and philosophical way of looking at the world.

Lindeman, the daughter of back-to-the-land parents, grew up in Mulmur Township outside of the town of Orangeville, ON. Early on, she connected with the environment, learning about the land; the subtle shifts from season to season, year to year, reflected in her natural surroundings.

"I grew up on 25 acres surrounded by several hundred acres, and it's still there. I've always had a very strong connection to places and to the land, especially as a kid. The passage of time, trees growing, landscape changing, the families of beaver and geese, the turtles in the pond. It's only natural that would be something I think about and write about."

The Weather Station continues to garner critical acclaim. Lindeman herself was nominated for the SOCAN songwriting prize in 2013. *Loyalty* landed on the long list for the prestigious Polaris Music Prize this year. But when talk turns to the nature of music business success today, she is, perhaps not surprisingly, philosophical about the whole thing.

"Ya, it's a beast; you gotta be careful. There's always somebody doing better or someone who has more cool stuff than you," she says. "But if you've come from the bottom and gone on tours and played shows to no one, you're always happy when someone comes."

The Weather Station tours Europe and the U.K. this fall before returning to Ontario for two shows, including one at Massey Hall opening for Bahamas as part of the Massey Hall Live concert series.



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Slocan Ramblers

With their star in ascendance, this bluegrass quartet finally find their own unique voice.

By Roger Levesque

Tell another folk fan that you're meeting up with a Toronto bluegrass band, and they may look at you quizzically.

How could the city best known as Canada's financial hub spawn Slocan Ramblers? Besides, isn't Slocan on the other side of the country?

Banjo man Frank Evans and bassist Alistair Whitehead set me straight. It turns out that along with all the other music you can find in that metropolis, Toronto is a hotbed of bluegrass. And the band comes by its name honestly since they also know British Columbia's Slocan Valley.

"We actually get that misconception about Toronto a lot," Evans grins. "It's a hidden gem of bluegrass talents for a few bands. The scene has grown over many years. We actually learned a lot from another Toronto band, The

Foggy Hogtown Boys."

That name clicks. It turns out The Ramblers caught the veteran band at regular Wednesday gigs in a small Toronto dive called The Silver Dollar. In fact, Hogtown Boys guitarist Chris Coole is a mentor of sorts who co-produced and wrote notes for The Ramblers' latest disc.

All the better to appreciate these rising stars of Canada's roots music scene, a quartet of gifted, energetic, 20-something musicians just out with their rousing second album, *Coffee Creek*. Adrian Gross's mandolin and Darryl Poulsen's guitar fill out the quartet, with Evans's lead vocal on most tracks (Poulsen and Whitehead sing some great harmonies). They play instrumentals, too, in their mix of originals, classics by the likes of Roy Acuff, or adaptations of Woody Guthrie.

Back to origins.

Growing up, Evans warmed to the banjo early on, taking lessons from Coole. The others grew into their knowledge of bluegrass. They're no strangers to the genius of Flatt, Scruggs, and Munroe, or the historical connections between Celtic and bluegrass traditions. But they zeroed in through newgrass and jazz influences such as Bela Fleck, Bill Frisell, and Creekling Tree

String Quartet, at festivals and Folk Alliance events.

Montreal's Gross actually met up with Whitehead and Poulsen in the jazz program at Toronto's Humber College and the first two were roommates for a while. Gross was an early bluegrass fan, Whitehead's Newfoundland upbringing came with a love of maritime folk and fiddle traditions, and Poulsen became a regular jamming partner.

After Evans was invited to jam with the other three, he wound up enrolling in Humber himself. Their jams inevitably led to a weekly gig at a local Irish pub, Cloak & Dagger, and by the time they graduated about 2011 The Slocan Ramblers had become a working entity.

What attracted them to bluegrass?

"It was the cool community aspect of folk music and the folk scene in Toronto," Whitehead says. "Feeling the direct energy in the room with Foggy Hogtown Boys and really passionate audiences was a contrast to the academic side of music at school, where you're getting into your head so much with complicated music. But having the technical facility to play jazz made it easier to learn bluegrass."

Evans adds his thoughts:



go largely live-off-the-floor for *Coffee Creek*. As Evans explains, they wanted the essence of a Ramblers live show:

“We recorded around a lot of mics and didn’t take nearly as much time, just to get that raw energy. In the end we actually came out of the studio after a couple of days feeling more energetic than when we went in. Writing and technique and experience had something to do with that, too.”

He explains that finding room for more new original material was a priority.

“We were still learning a lot of traditional repertoire in the beginning so we only had a couple of our tunes on the first album. But this time I felt like I was really starting to hear our own band sound. It’s exciting to compose and it shows your influences.”

“I think we got some good songs on this album,” Whitehead adds, “and now we’re all kind of chipping away at the tunes. One of the challenges of writing in the bluegrass-folk style is staying within the framework and themes and esthetic of the music without sounding too clichéd or predictable, finding your own voice within that tradition. We’re slowly stretching it more and more.”

Squeezing solos and improvisation into the shorter span of bluegrass tunes is a challenge.

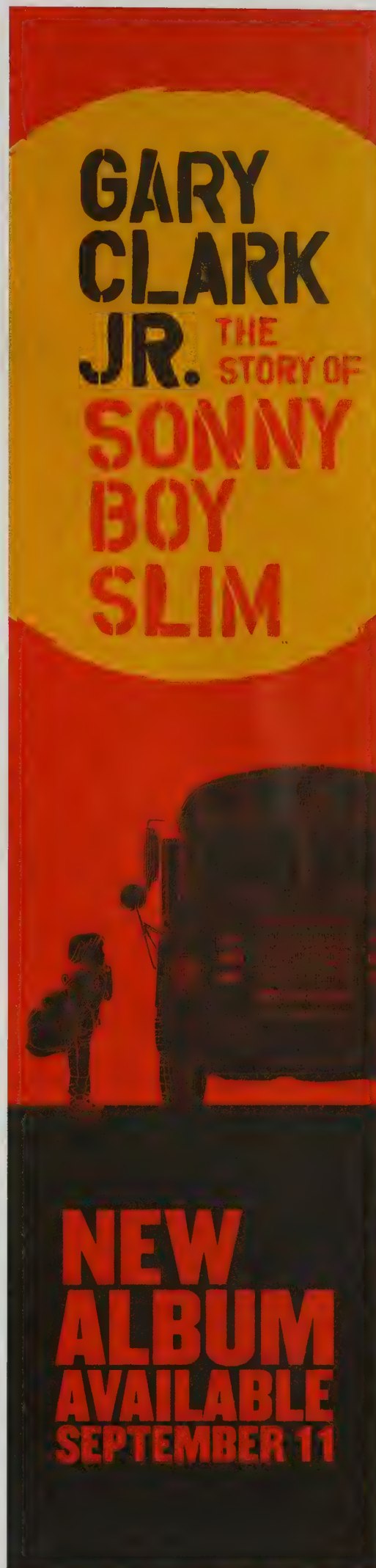
“You don’t always have a lot of time to find an idea and develop it so it’s kind of like playing speed-chess,” laughs Evans. “It forces you to be concise.”

He’s proud of the Canadian content and place names in their tunes but he admits his lead vocal sound comes from absorbing traditional American singers by osmosis rather than any conscious attempt at emulation. Either way, it adds character.

About that name: Whitehead spent many summers growing up in Slocan, BC, his parents live near there now, and the band has gone hiking through the Slocan Valley. The title *Coffee Creek* comes from the name of a dangerous turn in one of the roads out there.

The Ramblers’ first tour outside Toronto was through B.C. Since then, the band has crossed Canada a few times, heading from the northern Yukon as far south as Florida, hitting fests from Mariposa to the Edmonton Folk Music Festival, where I tracked them down after witnessing the group’s excellent energy win over a crowd. Some 150 dates into August this year even included opening for celebrity banjo man Steve Martin on the mainstage of Toronto’s jazz festival.

As Whitehead noted, “it was funny to go through jazz school and then wind up playing bluegrass at a jazz festival, but we want to keep expanding our audience.” Stéphanie Lépine



“There is a huge similarity between jazz and bluegrass. They’re both very solo-based music, often very arranged, and you have to be very technically proficient to play both styles. We’ve had a lot of audience crossover between them, too, but bluegrass can be simpler in some ways and more complicated in others.”

Which brings us to The Slocan Ramblers’ impressive balance of technique and expression, something Coole alludes to in his notes for *Coffee Creek*. As in any long-established tradition, bluegrass has at least a few philosophical approaches, and one of those tends to focus on speedy, athletic playing. Few musical genres put so much into almost sports-like competitions but the Ramblers recognize you can only take that so far.

“You shouldn’t go to a concert and feel exhausted afterwards,” Evans argues. “As a band we’ve been very conscious about that and we avoid stage sets where it’s all fast-paced. You can worry too much about trying to perfect things.”

That advice shaped the latest recording. As opposed to the carefully engineered, multi-tracked, pristine sound of their 2013 debut *Shaking Down The Acorns*, the band chose to



Stéphanie Lépine

Quebec's gifted fiddler stars on three new discs that highlight her great traditional roots.

By Yves Lambert

Translated by Jane Ehrhardt

Considered to be one of the best fiddlers of her generation, Stéphanie Lépine released not only one but two albums this past July: *La grande ligne*, which is an almost completely instrumental affair featuring her playing solo and accompanied by some special guests, and *Habillés en propre*, on which she sings and plays alongside Jean-François Branchard, who is playing violin rather than guitar as per usual.

Add to this the fact that she also collaborated on *Ojnaberies et autres bonjoritudes*, another album that was released in July, this time at the Mémoire et Racines festival, and that was recorded by banjoist and guitarist Jean-Paul Loyer before his death in 2009.

The latter is the continuation of the *Le Messenger* album that the band Ojnab released about 1993-1994, but this time more musicians were involved. Jean-Paul Loyer was considered to be one of the big brothers of the Quebecois trad revival: "I was part of Jean-Paul's second gang," Stéphanie tells us. "We shared immensely with him. We didn't need to add that many harmonies to his music because his melodies were so self-evident. Two or three of us could play the melody and it worked."

Over the past two decades, Stéphanie has adapted to just about everything, from the most rugged to the most sophisticated of sounds, from the Celtic influences of her beginnings to Quebecois compositions, and then to the explosive *Excès de trad* album that she recorded in 2010 with Simon Marion. On *La grande ligne*, Stéphanie returns to her musical roots.

"La Grande Ligne is the name of my street in Saint-Liguori in the Lanaudière region. But it represents more than that: it's my region, it's where I'm from and, at the same time, it stands for the grand continuity of things and for the transmission of the love of this music."

The album is well-rooted in her region as well as in her family. On this topic, Stéphanie tells us a great story, like those that can still be found in the Lanaudière region.

"There have been a lot of fiddlers in my family. My maternal grandmother's father, Joffre-Albert Ricard, was the parish fiddler. Practically all his sons played violin. Many of

them are no longer with us but I've played with my uncle Gilles before. He's still playing at 78 years old. Another one of my uncles recorded my uncle Noël around 1988-89, and I have access to the recording. You can recognize the Ricard touch—they played more with the end of the bow and with the violin resting on their chests. The stroke of the bow is delicate and they have great melody. My mother plays too."

Stéphanie goes on to list various other musicians on the Mailhot side of her family. All of these influences can be heard on *La grande ligne*. On it, she also interprets tunes from some of the great trad melody composers: here is the vigour of Jos Bouchard, the growling bow work and the earthiness of Isidore Soucy, the slowness and respiration of J.O. La Madeleine, and the beauty of Monsieur Édouard Richard.

Produced by Josianne Hébert of Galant, tu perds ton temps, the album features a few tracks in which Stéphanie's voice can be heard singing low in the mix.

She explains: "I found that when the voice was softer, it put the emphasis on the chord play. We did that on a few of my family's tunes. For me, putting the voice in the background makes it sound like someone's sur-

prised you are playing alone and singing just because you can't help it. That's pretty much the vision that we had for the album."

It really is a beautiful collection, recorded with the collaboration of Josianne on the harmonium, Jean-François Berthiaume on various forms of percussion, his brother David on the jew's harp, and Renaud Gratton on the trombone.

Habillées en propre is the third of Stéphanie's new albums and it features her as a duo with Jean-François Branchaud, a multi-instrumentalist who is involved in many bands including La Bottine Souriante, Ma Comère, B3 and Option Trad. His Bottine Souriante colleague Jocelyn Lapointe had this to say about him: "His voice is a mix of Yves Lambert's higher-pitched timbre and of André Marchand's fullness." On this album, he also plays guitar, tenor guitar, and podorhythm. As for Stéphanie, she is back on the violin and alto violin but sings more than on the other albums.

"We arranged the tunes together, working step by step. We had jammed before but we had never worked together. We clicked and the group was born," Jean-François tells us.

"I have a great friendship with him that is bound by music. Our repertoire is both full of

sweetness and nostalgia with, at the same time, a rather cheerful sound and beautiful depth," adds Stéphanie. "We wanted for the repertoire to be Quebecois, and not mixed with Irish. Indirectly, some French songs have found their way in there," Jean-François explains.

Some musical sources found on *La grande ligne* are also present here, such as Noël Ricard and J.O. La Madeleine. However, it also travels to the worlds of other important traditional figures, from Philippe Bruneau to Jean Carignan, although their reels are sometimes slowed down. Stéphanie discusses this: "I wanted to adapt some things to my way of playing. To play Carignan, yes, but not to imitate him, because it wouldn't fit with my playing, it's just not in me physically. I've admired him, I've tried to copy him, but after a certain number of years you tell yourself that it's not necessary. I like being able to play ornamentations, and when the tempo is too fast, they become less important."

Jean-François's accompaniment is a good balance for Stéphanie's more uplifting and jazzier side. Their playing marries well and the album features songs of love, of wartime homecomings, of travellers, as well as some melancholy tunes. Another fine piece of work.



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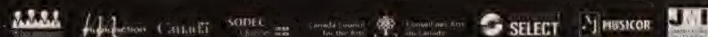
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Chris MacLean

Her moving new album reflects the nurturing landscape surrounding her rural Quebec home.

By Pat Langdon

Add them up. Of the 15 songs on Chris MacLean's cogent new folk/roots album *Procrastinator*, all but one mention some aspect of nature. In the spacious opening track, the lullaby *Close Your Eyes*, stars, clouds, and the northern sky appear. In the playfully urgent *Whiskey Kisses* it's the single word "hurricane". Elsewhere, there's a dark-winged bird, a lavender moraine, a flower that, possibly with a nod to Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Alan Ginsberg, pushes

through concrete.

Nature grounds her, says MacLean who spent her young years exploring the woods and fields around her native Peterborough, ON, and now lives in the countryside near Wakefield, QE, north of Ottawa. Stick her in a city and "I'm OK for few days and then I notice I'm anxious, I can't sleep. I realize when I come home, 'Oh, that's what it was! It's quiet here, and there's space'."

Nature was also integral to MacLean's first album, 2009's *Feet Be Still*. That record won the Ontario Arts Council's Colleen Peterson Award for Songwriting and earned MacLean a Canadian Folk Music Awards nomination for English Songwriter of the Year.

Not that MacLean, whose musical resume includes stints with the Ottawa-based Indo-Canadian ensemble Galitcha and the folk trio

Frida's Brow, dislikes her own species. But too many people in one spot—say, on a crowded highway—can yield what she calls a "hornet's nest. There's an energy, and it's not always friendly".

Nature, by contrast, rejuvenates, offers solace, links us to something bigger than ourselves. That's clear time and again on *Procrastinator*.

In *Across the Channel Tonight*, for example, we learn that the waters of the English Channel once carried a young man to war and death. Now they represent the passage from life to death of MacLean's mother, who loved that young man and who herself died in 2014. By the end of the song, which is accompanied by pedal steel, organ, melotron, and guitar, the passages of a young man and elderly woman have merged, providing the kind of comforting continuity that, along with destructive power, writers have for millennia associated with nature.

In addition to yielding one of the album's most moving songs, the death of MacLean's beloved mother had an unexpected influence on the new album. Most of the songs had been written before 2014 but because MacLean was caring for her mother, recording the album, which was financed by a Canada Council grant, was delayed.

"In the end, we did it really quickly," she says. "I just jumped right in. But it's more real, more alive than if you'd tweaked this and that and the other thing."

As you may have guessed from the album title, which is also the name of the one track that doesn't mention nature, jumping into recording or pretty much anything is not standard MacLean procedure. "I put off what I don't want to do, and even when I want to do something I wait till all my ducks are in order. It pisses me off that I do meaningless things like vacuuming or washing my car, things that aren't as important as my creative process."

Understanding such things about ourselves—which is not necessarily the same as doing something about them—tends to deepen with age. MacLean, now 58 and a grandmother of four, addresses this in a resonant line in her website bio when she says the new songs reflect a "well-earned, burgeoning wisdom".

One senses that arrival at wisdom, or at least at its front door, in *Lay My Burden Down*. The tune grew from a meditation retreat (MacLean admits to being a lousy meditator) to Assisi, Italy, in 2011 during which she was the resident musician. The trip included hiking to a mountain plateau where the vista was so gorgeous that, as she says in the song, "*I felt my flock of sorrows, rise and fly ... just a little flock of*

birds". Call it the wisdom of letting go of the things you can do nothing about.

If that trip to Italy yielded an important release of sorrow, a sojourn to South Africa in 2012 didn't always do so.

MacLean was there as part of her training as a practitioner of Voice Movement Therapy, which focuses on the voice as a vehicle for greater self-expression. During a group outing, a classmate discovered a purse on the side of a mountain embankment. Its contents, including lingerie and a crack pipe, suggested the missing owner may have been a prostitute with a drug addiction.

MacLean wanted to take the matter to the local police but was convinced the authorities would do nothing about it. The experience, too close for comfort to Canadian stories of missing and murdered Aboriginal women, haunted her so much that she turned it into *Sweet Release*, a powerful song about the fate of a young, addicted woman.

"I realized she could be anyone's daughter," says MacLean. "I wanted a song with a happier ending but every time I sing it I feel like I'm channeling this woman."

Closer to home, MacLean would also like to have seen a happier ending for an institution dear to her and many others: the Ottawa



Folklore Centre.

The music store and school declared bankruptcy in July after 38 years in business. Founder/owner Arthur McGregor played a key role in the local and national folk music scene—he was, for example, a founding member of the Canadian Folk Music Awards—and the loss of the centre was deeply felt across the Ottawa folk music community and beyond.

"It's a heartbreak. It feels like the end of an

era," says McLean, who taught voice at the centre and had known McGregor for four decades. "A lot of it has to do with online: people can buy instruments online, take music lessons online. But the sense of community that the Folklore Centre represented is gone; you can't have that online.

"Some of us feel orphaned. It represented a kind of home for our music."



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Highlights:

- 2015 Ontario Contact official showcase selection
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Highlights:

- 2011 Ontario Contact, Francofête and Pacific Contact official showcase selection
- 2012 ADISQ WINNERS: Instrumental album of the year
- 2012 Canadian folk music award winners: pushing the boundaries and instrumental group of the year

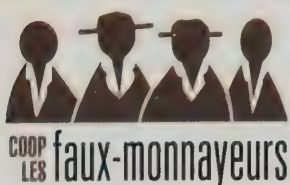


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Highlights:

- 2012 Galaxie Rising Star Award @ Mundial Montreal
- Prismatic Arts Festival, Calgary Folk Music Festival, Montreal Jazz Festival, Festival d'Été de Québec, Festival Rythmes du Monde de Saguenay, Mundial Montreal, Lotus Festival, Le Printemps de Bourges, Bourse Rideau, etc.



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Bassekou Kouyate & Ngoni Ba

The Malian master of the ngoni pushes the boundaries of traditional African music.

By Tony Montague

A park full of listeners beside a beach with sweeping views from bristling towers to blue-forested mountains and the open sea—bathed in evening sunshine. The scene before Bassekou Kouyate, king of the ngoni, was suitably majestic as he and his band, Ngoni Ba, stepped onto the main stage at this summer's Vancouver Folk Music Festival. It was the perfect setting for the Malian master to do what he likes best, taking a western audience on a ride deep into the African musical

culture without leaving the familiar contours of blues and rock.

Resplendent in turquoise-green robes, Kouyate and Ngoni Ba delivered a serene yet often searing set. The seven piece outfit—tagged by London daily *The Independent* “the best rock and roll band in the world”—played songs mainly from its latest recording *Ba Power*, which makes the rock connection more evident than ever.

The members of Ngoni Ba aren't anything like western rock and rollers, however. They're family—mother, father, two sons, and other relatives. And most of them play different sizes of the same stringed instrument, the ngoni—a paddle-shaped, skin-covered lute. It's likely the ancestor of the banjo, and is still very much alive. Kouyate plays the lead soprano ngoni, Amy Sacko, his wife, is the lead vocalist, and

there are four other ngoni players, backed by a percussionist and a West African talking drummer.

The case for the ngoni as great granddad of the five-string banjo is compelling: the player's right thumb picks the highest string, and the ngoni's body is more like a drum than a box in its construction. With no sustain, notes on the ngoni are razor-sharp and dry, the rhythms are intense, and the riffs and grooves cut deep.

“It's Africa's history,” says Kouyate, interviewed before the show, and speaking in French. “The ngoni has been played for thousands of years in greater Mali—for every king and dignitary, every marriage, every hero and warrior.”

In the Bambara language that Kouyate and family speak, Ba—as in both Ngoni Ba and *Ba Power*—means strong or great, but can

also signify a group. “The album is called *Ba Power* because the messages that it carries are powerful. And without a doubt, the music is our hardest and toughest sound to date.”

For many years Kouyate performed and recorded with the great Malian kora player Toumani Diabate. The idea of creating an ensemble of his own made up of musicians all playing the ngoni didn’t meet immediate or universal acclaim in Mali. Some thought Kouyate was crazy but he persevered and received strong encouragement from the late Ali Farka Toure, father of the desert blues, a style that melds electric blues and nomadic traditions from northwest Africa. “I worked with Ali on his last album, *Savane*. He wanted to help me. He used to say, ‘You have to launch your own career now’.”

Bassekou took his mentor’s advice, and in 2007 released *Segu Blue* to huge acclaim in Europe. *I Speak Fula* followed in 2009 and *Jama Ko* in 2013, deepening the unique Malian roots groove he was carving out. The recording process for *Ba Power* began last year at home in Bamako, Mali’s capital, where Ngoni Ba played together in a laid-back family space.

With all the members related, communication in the band is intuitive and responses are immediate. “The sound I make, and my quest

to modernize it, started from *Segu Blue*, and I’ve taken it farther with each new album,” says Kouyate. “My aim is to reach many more people with the music, because it carries African culture with it.”

Kouyate’s inventive approach, his virtuosic playing, and his use of effects has inevitably drawn comparisons with Jimi Hendrix, and these have increased since *Ba Power*’s release in April. Kouyate is proud to be associated with the Seattle guitar genius but points out, “I didn’t listen to specific bands or musicians. I saw from live experience that when I used the wah-wah pedal, for instance, people were starting to smile and dance more. Young people like rock music and I hear it on the radio, and in festivals—and also I like it myself, of course. Traditional African music has to be revalued and modernized. You can’t always play just like your parents and grandparents did.”

Kouyate is far from that in Vancouver as he and Ngoni Ba launch into the propulsive and melodic *Siran Fen*, Sackou’s voice gives way to Kouyate’s searing psychedelic ngoni, and the dancers in the crowd become a writhing mass. Nevertheless, neither the album nor the live show is flat-out African rock all the way. Though Kouyate wrote most of the songs there’s also a much older wellspring, from the

tradition of the griots, the caste of Manding musicians and storytellers to which he and his family belong.

“My father was a griot, as were my grandfather and great-grandfather. I come from the region of Ségu in a village called Garana. My mother, Yagaré Damba, was a praise singer and my father, Mustapha, taught me the ngoni when I was 11 years old. I play Bamana music like my family, but also music of the Manding and Fula, and all of the different peoples of Mali.”

With his fast-growing popularity outside Mali, Kouyate is in search of a point of equilibrium for the music of Ngoni Ba between traditional African and progressive Western. He likes to play to both ends of the spectrum of his followers.

“Basically I have two kinds of people who listen to my music: Africans, who understand what I’m singing and that for some part listen to my music for that, and others who listen to my music for the feeling it gives them, even though they don’t understand the words. So I wanted to maintain some tradition, to keep on pleasing my African audience, but I also wanted more salt and pepper, for people from Europe, Asia, America. That’s a balance I continue to look for.”

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T. Buckley Trio

Off-the-cuff spontaneity fuels their new disc's well-crafted originals and playful covers.

By Eric Volmers

A “misdirected creative residency”? The joke gets repeated more than once by members of Calgary’s T. Buckley Trio when discussing its newly released record, *Nowhere Fast*.

It seems an attempt to deflate the serious-sounding official title of the two-week musical adventure T. Buckley, bassist Derek Pulliam, and guitarist Tim Leacock found themselves on last winter at the Banff Centre, a cultural jewel in the mountains where the band’s latest record was recorded.

The centre calls them “self-directed creative residencies”.

“When we got there, we immediately coined it the ‘misdirected creative residency,’” says Buckley with a laugh, sitting with his band-

mates at a coffee shop in Calgary’s southwest.

As the official name suggests, the program offers a good deal of freedom for artists, allowing creativity to run wild amid the breathtaking splendour of the Canadian Rockies. In the winter of 2014, the centre was bustling. The trio rubbed shoulders with musicians of all types, from New York sax players to classical cellists.

But, perhaps blessed with an Albertan sense of practicality, Buckley, Leacock, and Pulliam eventually decided the time would be best spent documenting where they were at this point in their musical evolution.

So Pulliam, who owns a studio in Calgary, crammed as much recording equipment as he could into his van for the trip into the mountains. At the Banff Centre’s Hut 28—a rather modest and decidedly cramped structure on the facility’s grounds—the trio recorded upwards of 30 songs, resulting in a freewheeling collection of originals, covers, and experiments alike.

“(The Banff Centre) looks after pretty much everything you could be concerned about,” says Buckley. “Food is looked after. Accommodations are looked after, and everything else.

And you are in pretty incredible surroundings for two weeks. You can go for a walk if you need to get some air. Basically, they want your sole purpose to be focused on creating.”

The 11 songs on *Nowhere Fast* certainly reflect the off-the-cuff nature of the recording process. Other than Leacock’s electric guitar, it’s largely an acoustic outing featuring 12-string, steel guitar, bass, mandolin, and a guest appearance by fiddler Ben Plotnick, who happened to be doing a residency at the Banff Centre at the same time.

As on his previous records, Buckley’s gentle, understated tunes recall the great Texas songsmiths who first sparked his appreciation for country music as a teen, when his father took him to see a concert featuring Lyle Lovett, Guy Clark, and Joe Ely.

He applies his quiet, honey-coated tenor to both well-crafted originals such as melodic opening ballad *Don’t Lose Your Way* and the yearning *If I Had You Now* and to playful covers of Neil Young’s *Birds* and Gordon Lightfoot’s *Steel Rail Blues*.

But the main difference between *Nowhere*

Fast and Buckley's previous records, which include 2014's love letter to Alberta, *Northern Country Soul*, is that it is a true band effort. Buckley stresses that this is not a solo album. Yes, it's still his name in the title but this is the first album credited to the T. Buckley Trio and the first where writing and singing duties were shared. Pulliam offers the country shuffle *Show Time in the City*, a favourite live tune for the band, while Leacock offered two co-writes.

The guitarist is a veteran of Calgary's roots scene, with stints playing in the late Billy Cowsill's Co-Dependents, National Dust alongside Lorrie Matheson, and backing up singer Tom Phillips. Leacock contributes the snarling *Had It With You*, an old co-write with Cowsill, and *Nowhere Radio*, which he wrote with Phillips.

Both Pulliam and Leacock sing their own compositions on the record, which also features covers of Phillips's *Lighter Load* and *Nowhere Fast*, the album's title track. With all these literary cooks in the kitchen, the results could have come off as less than cohesive. But the stripped-down recording process in the Banff Centre's cramped Hut 28 seems to have created an even-handed aesthetic throughout the album.

"As much as the writing might be a little disparate, sonically, it all hangs together really

well," Buckley says. "We've kept it to this group and what we do. It's all in-house, so sonically it really hangs together."

The songwriter says the Trio's evolution from singer-and-backup to bona fide band has largely been due to another residency. For two years, the T. Buckley Trio have played Tuesday nights at Calgary's Wine-Ohs, a wine bar and eatery that features live music in its basement.

These weekly outings have turned the Trio into a tight fighting unit onstage, adept at near-telepathic instrumental interplay and able to draw on a formidable list of far-flung originals and cover songs.

It also shows that the three do not have a precious attitude when it comes to performing. Bar residencies are not exactly in vogue among the hipper-than-thou types of the music scene. But the Wine-Oh gigs have proven useful, even on nights when the club was barren.

"If you look at your thing as an art form, maybe you only want to display your art sparsely," Leacock says. "A painter might paint all year and only do one or two shows. But I think with music, it's meant to be played all the time. It's everywhere. Our job as musicians is to take it out of elevators and shopping malls and put it back in front of people."

This reflects Leacock's own journeyman,

decades-long run in Calgary's music community. He was first introduced to Buckley a decade ago. Pulliam told him about this young writer he was recording, convincing him to play steel guitar on Buckley's debut EP.

Leacock, who has backed some of Calgary's best songwriters, was and remains impressed by the younger writer.

"I like the fact that a lot of his lyrics and narrative is more about this part of the world," he says. "I think there's a tendency here that people want to write songs that mention Nashville or mention Memphis and talk about the States. That's all good, but there's plenty of room for a narrative here."

And, for now, here is exactly where the act plans to stay, resisting any urge to decamp to Nashville or other musical Meccas.

"At this stage, we're all family guys and have made our home here for most of our lives," Buckley says. "I think, in a lot of ways, making music in this province is a pretty great place to do it. We get a lot of shows in rural Alberta, really great concert-type gigs where they look after you and pay you well. I think so much of what we do is grassroots-based and we've got a lot of creative control over where things go. I don't think any of us feel we have to go anywhere else to do what we do."





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The Honey Dewdrops

Their impeccable harmonies and heartfelt songs elicit comparisons with roots royalty.

By J. Poet

It's rare that two voices blend as well as those of Kagey Parrish and Laura Wortman. It's not just that their harmonies are impeccable but the timbres of their voices that work so well together in their acoustic duo, the Honey Dewdrops.

It's a magical combination—such as Simon & Garfunkel, The Everly Brothers, or Gram Parsons and Emmylou Harris—that make the whole so much bigger than the sum of the parts. So it's rather astonishing that they had been playing together for a few years before they discovered this.

"When we started, Kagey was just playing fills," says Wortman on the phone from their home in Baltimore, MD. "We had learned the

Neil Young song *Unknown Legend* and Kagey chimed in and started singing harmony on the chorus. It was one of those freak moments. It came out of nowhere."

Their new album, *Tangled Country*, is a wonderful display of harmony duets, no matter who is handling the lead vocals, although Wortman does the majority. They have been compared to Gillian Welch and David Rawlings but to these ears it's more like Buddy and Julie Miller.

Wortman calls their vocal combination a "stroke of luck". But perhaps the really lucky part is that they have found in each other a life partner as well as a musical foil. They have been together for 12 years, since they played briefly together in a cover band when they were college students in Virginia, discovered a common love of acoustic traditional music and fell in love with each other. "We were kind of checking each other out but the music came first," she says.

This is the only serious band either has played in. At first it was a part-time thing: they were both teachers for a few years after college. Their big turning point came in 2008

when they entered a contest for 20-somethings on Garrison Keillor's *Prairie Home Companion* radio show—and they won it, much to their astonishment. "We were so surprised by the reaction," Wortman says. The following year they decided to make the plunge and go full-time, with the proviso that they could go back to teaching if it didn't work out after a year or two. They arranged their first of many cross-country tours, and they are still on the road for much of the year.

Both being native Virginians, it would have been easy to stay on the road with traditional Appalachian-influenced music but there has been a lot of evolution going on instead, not just in style, which has become more folkie and less old-time, but in the songwriting. They have upped their songwriting game to make it more personal, more from the heart, rather than murder ballads, for instance.

And it was a Canadian—David Francey—who had a major influence on this change of direction. They saw Francey for the first time at a small festival they were both playing, and were totally blown away by his songs. "Not

just the form or the way he sings but the topics, and how heartfelt they are and the emotion and the power,” Parrish says. “He has a way with words, and that inspired us to look inside. ... Making those words with our own voices, this is what feels good. When it feels like this is what I’ve been called to do, you just know you’re on the right track.”

They have been down the road of storytelling but *Tangled Country* is more introspective, looking at personal issues such as the loneliness of having more friends on Facebook than you ever had in real life, feeling fed up with the same old boring life and getting the urge to “take to the road until the road runs out”.

No doubt they will continue to be influenced by their background in the South, not so much by the traditional music as by the changes that are happening there. In the last few months the South has been shocked by the racist murders of nine people in a black church in South Carolina, as well as cases of police brutality against African-Americans, which caused riots in their new hometown of Baltimore, which is on the cusp of the South.

“I hope you have the next six hours,” Parrish says when asked about being a southerner today. “Maybe the quickest way into it is that the Civil War is not quite over yet. There are



a lot of ghosts for sure that just won’t give up and go away.”

When you travel around the South, you still see lots of Confederate flags, which he says is not helpful as it is a sign of hate, and there are still many remnants of racism, including entire impoverished towns that time seems to have forgotten.

Wortman says many issues need to be addressed but in some ways it is a heady time to be part of the South as it is undergoing change. “I have few doubts that songs and other forms of art will keep pouring out of the community and exposing these thoughts.”

Settling in Baltimore after spending much of their lives in the hills of Virginia is like going

from *The Beverly Hillbillies* to *The Wire*, in television terms. They had been in and out of Baltimore numerous times, and found that it had everything they’re looking for in terms of recording and a general music scene. Being there made it possible to round out their sound with the addition of pedal steel guitar, standup bass, and a bit of harmonica and piano.

And as part of the effort to continually expand their horizons, they have gotten together with Caleb Stine, a Baltimore singer/songwriter, and toured as a trio in July. This collaboration could result in a record, and take the Honey Dewdrops on more side trips before their road runs out, which at this point seems unlikely to happen.



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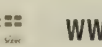
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Simpson, Cutting and Kerr

Inspired arrangements, great traditional songs, evocative originals, this trio touch all the bases.

By J. Poet

The Cambridge Folk Festival, England, August 2015. Backstage. Behind the dustbins. Three of the leading lights of the modern British folk scene are almost hugging one another in delight. Simpson, the evergreen guitar and banjo virtuoso, has brought along a song he wants the others to play with him...a variant on the ballad *William Taylor* that Simpson originally heard by one of his earliest inspirations, Hedy West.

In no time at all they've nailed it...fully aware that the next time they tackle it, it'll probably sound entirely different. Yet still wonderful. "This is just GREAT!" yells Simpson, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

"Trust...it's all about trust," says Nancy Kerr. "We never play anything the same way twice. It's a meeting of minds. It's all about empathy."

That's what you get when you put together three kindred spirits who also happen to be masters of their art and simply love to play. Simpson's brilliance has long been recognized across several decades, both as a solo performer and with numerous celebrated collaborations, from June Tabor onwards; Andy Cutting is one of the finest melodeon players in the land—any land—with a CV of recordings and live appearances involving many of the biggest names in folk music.

And with folk music ingrained in her very being, early duets with Eliza Carthy, a long, much-cherished partnership with her Australian husband James Fagan, and a front-line involvement with award-winning band The Full English, fiddle player/singer Nancy Kerr has now also blossomed into one of Britain's finest songwriters.

Small wonder then that Simpson Cutting Kerr have stormed to great heights this year on the back of their debut album, *Murmurs*. One of those consummate recordings that touches all the bases, it switches between inspired arrangements of great traditional songs such as *The Cruel Mother* and *Plains Of Waterloo* to some serious tune-making and some superb, evoc-

ative, self-written contemporary songs. Such as Simpson's *Dark Swift and Bright Swallow*, which reflects on one of the disasters of the Second World War when a thousand American sailors were blown up by a German E-boat off the southwest coast of England while rehearsing for the D-Day landings, a tragedy shrouded in secrecy for half a century. Nancy Kerr, too, has written a couple of corks: *Dark Honey*, a metaphorical musing about bees, and *Not Even The Ground*, a protest song about fracking.

Simpson and Cutting have played regularly together over the years, while Kerr first worked with Simpson on his *Kind Letters* album. "The real watershed moment," she says, "came with an instrumental version of *The Blacksmith*, on which I was playing cello, and he really tutored me through it. He said, 'Just imagine you are accompanying one of the old source singers you've listened to', and that was a real moment of realization about how instrumental music can have the same space that songs have."

In fact, it was Martin's wife Kit Bailey who suggested they form a trio and all three of them are enthused enough to want to do more and more. Not easy, of course, when they all have a million other projects—not to mention growing



Photo by Andy Cutting, Martin Simpson and Nancy Kerr

families—to attend to but where there's a will and all that...

"It really is a joy," says Nancy. "It feels really sustainable and expressive and it is definitely ongoing. *Murmurs* is only just out—we made it in two and a half days, pretty much live—and we had all this other stuff we couldn't fit on that so we put out a deluxe version. And since then we've been putting together new material all the time when we meet. Even behind the bins at Cambridge Folk Festival."

They say life begins at 40 and the success of Simpson Cutting Kerr is the icing on the cake of an unforgettable 12 months for Nancy, in which she won many accolades with the all-star group The Full English, for whom she wrote an acclaimed song about the traditional singer Joseph Taylor; and was crowned Singer of the Year at this year's BBC Folk Awards.

"I'm not an awards sort of person but it was really lovely because I really question what I do quite a lot. I question whether I'm providing something good enough and to get an award like that is really helpful, artistically. I know that sounds pretentious and diva-ish but I don't mean it that way. It's just that when you get that sort of support it really pushes you on. I'm

not a big star with a lot of resources behind me, I'm a grassroots folkie. I've been on the scene a long time so you can't say it's industry nonsense."

She grew up listening to traditional ballads. (her mother Sandra is a singer and songwriter of great renown and her father Ron Elliott was an outstanding Northumbrian piper). But, having long been acknowledged as a fine fiddle player and traditional song interpreter, the great leap forward has been her emergence as a major songwriting force.

Her songs initially filtered into her duo repertoire with James Fagan and showcased in earnest on their 2010 album *Twice Reflected Sun*, which in turn led to her first solo album, last year's *Sweet Visitor* with the formation of her own band to tour it.

"It took me 20 years to make my first solo album," she laughs. "But in a way I'm glad—I wasn't ready 20 years ago. But I was brought up with protest songs and that sharpens the mind. When I start a song I know what I'm aiming for. I've rarely written a song that I don't feel incredibly emotional about, almost to the degree of crying when I'm writing something. It's very intense. But it's quite cathartic

and therapeutic, too. I can't think anything can be more fun than songwriting."

She's now also involved in another big project, collaborating with Martyn Joseph, Patsy Reid, Nick Cook, and Maz O'Connor on *Sweet Liberties*, a musical commemoration of the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta, something she's been researching via visits to the Houses of Parliament, studying ancient scrolls.

And there's a little matter of a visit to Canada, which she's very excited about, too. "I've done quite a bit in Ontario, which I love, and I have great memories of Newfoundland, where I played with some great fiddle players like Jean Hewson and Christina Smith. I love it. The Canadian festivals are so innovative."

All this, a husband also in great demand for sessions and concerts, and a couple of small children to bring up...you imagine her as some sort of superwoman.

"Definitely not! Being self-employed is weird and family life is messy but we make it work. And looking after kids is way more tiring than doing gigs..."



John Wort Hannam

Alberta's travelling troubadour dwells on parenthood and tackles riveting social issues.

By Lisa Wilton

John Wort Hannam had just hung up the phone after speaking with his wife when he realized he'd made the error all husbands dread.

"It was our 18th wedding anniversary and I didn't mention anything," recalls the Alberta singer, who was in Oklahoma City for the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival.

"I sat at my hotel room desk and picked up those little pieces of paper they leave near the phone and wrote a song in about 30 minutes."

Hannam phoned back his wife to sing the freshly penned song, but there was no answer.

"I left it on her voice mail," he says with a chuckle. "Thankfully, we're still married."

That tune he wrote last year as way of an apology, *Chasing the Song*, is a highlight of Hannam's latest album, *Love Lives On*, set for release Oct. 2.

Hannam has never been one to share much of his personal life in his songs but on *Love Lives On* he sheds any previous reservations he may have had about it.

"I really have opened up about certain aspects of my personal life," he says.

"It comes from having more confidence to allow myself to open up. I've changed as a person over the past few years and I wanted this record to reflect that."

There are a handful of tracks on *Love Lives On* that reflect the life of a travelling troubadour but the album's signature song, and its most emotionally riveting, was inspired by his previous job as a teacher on the Kainai Blackfoot Nation in southern Alberta.

Though the track, *Man of God*, is not directly linked to his time on the reserve, it tackles the sad and controversial history and legacy of

residential schools in Canada.

"That song is important to me for a few reasons," he says. "My degree is in Native American studies and this is the first time I've been able to wrap my head writing about that topic."

Man of God—which shines an unflattering light on religious leaders who were instrumental in the removal of children from their parents in First Nations communities for more than 100 years—was included in the closing ceremonies for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Ottawa in June.

"I don't think I could have written that song before becoming a parent. I still struggled a bit writing it because I'm a white guy coming pretty much from a place of privilege and I had no idea what it was like to go to a residential school. The one thing I could grasp onto, though, is the thought of somebody pulling up one day in a big, black car and taking my son from my arms and driving away."

Hannam became a father for the first time

three years ago and says everything in his life has changed as a result.

It's been a change for the good but he admits raising a young son also made the recording process more difficult to schedule.

Most of the songs on *Love Lives On* were written almost three ago and it took an entire 12 months for Hannam to record them all.

"I was used to recording albums very quickly, like, going into a studio for only four or five days," says Hannam, whose album was produced by fellow Alberta singer/songwriter Leroy Stagger at the latter's Rebeltone Ranch Studio in Lethbridge.

"This was recorded when I could carve out some time so it took a lot longer."

Hannam and Stagger have a lengthy history, having met a decade ago. They've played one-off shows and toured together with musician Dave McCann as the Highway 3 Roots Revue.

"I really look up to Leroy as a great songwriter and he's coming into his own as a producer," Hannam says.

Under Stagger's deft production, Hannam's resonant mid-range voice shines and his melodies breathe, accented by tasteful placements of horns, fiddles, and slide guitar.

Though *Love Lives On* isn't a massive departure from Hannam's first four albums, it is his

most consistent and confident offering.

That confidence comes, in part, from following a quote from his favourite poet and writer, Walt Whitman, which can be found in the liner notes of *Love Lives On*:

"This hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines / Going where I list, my own master total and absolute."

"I really tried to follow that philosophy," he says. "I wrote whatever I wanted to write and I didn't give myself any confines. In the past, a song like *Over The Moon*, I would have written about four or five lines and then quit and said, 'Oh, that's not a John Wort Hannam song'. But on this record, I kept following whatever muse was with me that day and went along for the ride. I didn't try to overthink whether or not it was in a mainstream vein or a pop-country vein. Whatever words came, that's what I wrote down and that was the song."

At 47, Hannam is just beginning to become a major name in Canada's roots and country music scenes. While many musicians his age have been schlepping gear for a good 30 years, Hannam has been a professional musician for half that time.

He sang in the Calgary Boys' Choir between the ages of nine and 12 but abandoned music when he entered junior high.

"It's sad, actually," the Juno Award-nominated songwriter muses. "I quit singing because it just wasn't cool. I might have been cool if I was singing punk rock or something like that, but I was singing choral music. And when you have Wort as part of your last name you try to remain as invisible as possible. I didn't need to add choir boy to that."

Several years later, Hannam became interested in the narrative-driven songs of such artists as Fred Eaglesmith and Loudon Wainwright III. Fifteen years ago, he found himself playing three songs at an open mic at the Lethbridge Folk Club.

"The guy said, 'If you come back next week to sing, I'll give you \$50'. And that little cartoon light bulb went off over my head and I was like, 'People will pay me to sing these? Because I'm going to sing them anyways'."

Hannam says he wishes he'd started playing music earlier but doesn't like focusing on the should've and could've in life.

"I'm happy where I am in my career," he says. "I'm happy I made the decision to start again. I was a late bloomer but I always thought that if you try something and fall flat on your face, try something else. That part was never a concern and I don't really think about my age."



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Gill Landry

Former Old Crow Medicine Show guitarist's densley poetic lyrics flirt with dark shadows By J. Poet

When he's playing with his compadres in the Old Crow Medicine Show, Gill Landry contributes his share of flashy fretwork and stirring harmony vocals to the band's cheerful, retro sound. On his solo albums, it's a different story.

He walks on the dark side of the street, flirting with shadows and heartache. *Gill Landry*, his eponymous third album, is another

raw, emotional collection, marked by songs of beautiful desolation. His rumbling baritone expresses a world-weary sense of introspection that will be familiar to anyone who has ever been unlucky in love. The densely poetic lyrics are full of the feelings we long to express to a lover when things are going awry but usually wind up keeping to ourselves.

"I actually walk on the sunny side of the street as much as I can," Landry says with a gentle laugh. "I don't feel dark but I am aware of all the hard things going on around me that people tend to ignore. Feeling them, and writing about them, is a hopeful thing to do, even if it's not going to get better. It's acknowledging the structure of how things are in the world. It's not good or bad, it's just the way it is. I'm

generally pretty forthcoming when I talk to people. Sometimes I express myself even more poetically than I can when I write."

On previous albums, Landry's love songs were balanced by tunes that sounded like traditional folk ballads about bad men and hard times. This time, songs of lost love dominate the playlist. They're so intimate, it's hard to imagine they're not autobiographical.

"I do intend for some of the songs [on this album] to be heard by certain individuals," Landry confesses, "but in some sense, everything I write is autobiographical. There's always an attempt to find some meaning in my experiences. When I sing songs I wrote 15 years ago, I'm finding out I can feel them deeply, and sing them better, if they have a

direct personal connection to my life. I've been through all these scenarios and had all these feelings but I wouldn't say I'm more unlucky in love than many other people, at least, not so much these days." He pauses, then adds with another wry chuckle, "but life changes all the time".

Landry assembled the songs on the album over a two and a half year period, during his down time between Old Crow Medicine Show tours. (He recently left the band to concentrate on his songwriting career.) He played most of the instruments and sang most of the harmonies himself, producing and recording in his small apartment on the south side of Nashville.

"I didn't want to go into the studio with a band and make a record the same way I've done before," he explains. "I wrote these songs when I was home. I recorded the guitar and drum parts over at (engineer) Brad Biven's house, then took 'em home and started stacking tracks. I didn't have the songs fully finished when I started. I just pecked away at them when I wasn't on tour. I think the process is like sculpting. The original idea [of a song] is the block of granite. Then you see how much music and how many words you want to add or subtract to see what you're talking about. I don't actually remember writing any of them.

I remember sitting at the kitchen table with my guitar but I don't keep a journal, so I don't know how slow or fast the process is. You get a frame written, then you record it. If it doesn't work, you keep chipping away at it."

Although the songs on *Gill Landry* concern themselves with the distressing aspects of intimacy, as they unfold, they point the way to forgiveness and reconciliation. Landry's sparkling fingerpicking on the album opener, *Funeral in My Heart*, provides a counterpoint to dark lyrics infused with a bitter, ironic humor. *Waiting for Your Love* is taken at a solemn pace, with moaning pedal steel notes and long sustained fiddle notes adding an almost unbearable tension to the tale of man waiting for the lover he knows will never come back.

Fennario recalls the happy times in a relationship, wondering why they can't be recaptured. Hollow mariachi horns and guitar fills that echo Grady Martin's work with Marty Robbins intensify the yearning expressed in the lyrics.


"I referenced *El Paso* when I asked my friend Robert Ellis to play guitar on that song. I wanted to have the voice alternating between the vocal and guitar." The album closer, *Bad Love*, is a slow, sad ballad but Landry sends out a hopeful benediction to a former lover when

he sings: "I hope you find what you're looking for / and you have no regrets when you think of me."


Throughout the album, Landry is masterful at capturing the pain and frustrations of romance. His melodies embrace your heart with a tender, aching melancholy that's strangely comforting, while his lyrics explore the landscape of emotional desolation with a quiet passion. So does he ever write happy songs?

"It depends on what you call a happy song," he quips. "I'd say yeah, but I can't think of one. It's a goal of mine to find a way to do that but writing about sad things, ominous things, gives a song more mystery. There's more rubbernecking going on for bad things than for butterflies and rainbows. Happy songs don't sound genuine if you're not referencing a genuine experience. When you're feeling happy, when you're in love, you don't write. You're elated. You want to spend as much with your lover as possible. When they leave you, you have a lot to communicate and nobody listening. More songs come to you when you're trying to figure things out. If you try to figure out why things are good when you're in a relationship, you can make them bad. Not always, but you can easily fuck up a good thing."


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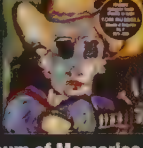
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ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE



Tom Russell pens a compelling masterpiece – a bold, gritty folk opera – grounded in the history of cowboy songs that still stir his acute imagination. By **Roddy Campbell**

WEST

O utrageously ambitious, Tom Russell's sprawling, 52-track cowboy odyssey, *The Rose of Roscrae*, spans the breathtaking boundaries of the old American West with a soundtrack as courageous as it is masterful. By any definition, it's a folk opera. And clearly the most significant since Peter Bellamy created *The Transports* back in 1977.

This veritable feast of traditional and original songs, united with spoken word and orchestral refrains, is absorbed by a lustrous cast that includes Guy Clark, Joe Ely, Jimmie Dale Gilmore, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Augie Meyers, Finbar Furey, Jerry Douglas, Maura O'Connell, Eliza Gilkyson, Ana Gabriel, David Olney, Dan Penn, Gurf Morlix, Gretchen Peters, The McCrary Sisters, Ian Tyson... And their voices are augmented by archive recordings of Johnny Cash, Walt Whitman, A.L. Lloyd, Lead Belly, Bonnie Dobson, Tex Ritter, Moses (Clear Rock) Platt, Sour-dough Slim...as well as excerpts from The Norwegian Wind Ensemble, a Swiss yodel choir, and a chorus of students from Pasadena, CA. Phew!

A raw, cracking tale, 20 years in the making, *The Rose of Roscrae* retraces the preposterous life of 90-year-old Johnny Dutton, who, as a bruised and battered teenager, abandons Templemore, Ireland, and the beautiful Rose Malloy of Roscrae, to become a cowboy in West Texas. While Johnny eventually brings Rose to America, he jilts her to wander the West as a bare-knuckle fair-ground boxer, philanderer, card sharp, and gunslinger.

As the outlaw Johnny-Behind-The-Deuce, he is pursued from Mexico to Canada by the sanctimonious but dubious preacher and lawman, Augie Blood. Framed, Johnny barely escapes a hanging but winds up in Angola State Penitentiary doing 10 hard years. On his release, he meets his down-and-out, alcoholic cousin, Joseph Dutton, on the streets of Laredo. But a determined Joseph sets off to join the sainted Father Damien, a renegade priest who takes care of lepers on the Hawaiian island of Molokai.

Johnny's so moved and mystified by Joseph's position that he vows to put his life back together, too, and prays to Father Damien for redemption. With his soul somewhat salvaged, Johnny makes his way back to Templemore by singing old Irish songs in bars and pubs for tips. At nearby Roscrae he reunites with Rose and they end their days as friends. It's a heroic story and a score truly worthy of a Broadway musical.

"The people who did *Beautiful: The Carol King Musical* might be interested in listening to it," says Russell on the phone from his home in Santa Fe, NM. "That's a slower process but I would rather hand it over to professionals than put a cast together myself.

"I grew up on Broadway musicals like *Oklahoma*, *Annie Get Your Gun*... But I wanted to make a musical written with a more authentic dialogue and songs that had some grit to them. So many of the Broadway musicals about the West are great but they're corny. They are written by easterners. Cole Porter wrote cowboy songs. They have great melodies but they don't speak the truth. I write about the West. It's a more realistic look at things.

"Also, I explore songs like *The Streets of Laredo*. Where in the hell did it come from? Well A.L. [Bert] Lloyd tells us it came from the [melody of] *The Unfortunate Rake*, a lad dying from syphilis in a London hospital.

"[The hanging song] *Sam Hall* goes back to *The Climbing Boy*—a chimney sweep. It's amazing to think that back in the 1700s they put little kids up chimneys. So the original *Sam Hall* was a chimney sweep. I love all that.

"You know it is an edgy record. In a way it takes an edgy look at the American West. My brother Pat [Russell], he's older than me. He is a cowboy. Ian [Tyson] wrote *Cowboy Pride* based on my brother. He was the one that turned me on as a teenager to cowboy music: Tex Ritter, Marty Robbins, Johnny Cash's stuff... Pat lived on a huge Spanish ranch in the middle of California. And I would hear all the stories of the Irish immigrants—people who came in and became cowboys. I

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just listened to the way they talked. My brother and sister-in-law, they understood the West, and they talked really plainly about it. It wasn't romanticized. I used that as the inspiration and eventually got it onto this record."

Russell also drew from Charles Portis's western novel *True Grit*, Thomas Berger's *Little Big Man* and Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*. "*Les Miserables* with cowboy hats," jokes Russell.

What the great western movie makers such as John Ford or Sam Peckinpah might have made out of this script, one can only surmise. Russell's grand opening *Overture* played by the Norwegian Wind Ensemble—one of the oldest orchestras in the world—certainly offers a nod of recognition to the dramatic music cast as a backdrop to romantic, panoramic scenes of the West in such classic films as *She Wore A Yellow Ribbon* or *Ride The High Country*. Yet, at its very core, *The Rose of Roscrae* is an ingenious and succinct history of cowboy music and song, galvanized by all of its sprawling international roots.

But just for the record: many critics attribute the first rousing rumble of Americana to Tom Russell and Dave Alvin, and the album *Tulare Dust: A Songwriters' Tribute to Merle Haggard* (1994). Just don't consider *The Rose of Roscrae* to be Americana.

"To be honest, I get pissed off when people say, 'Oh, you're Americana'. I go, 'What does that mean? What about Canada? What about Mexico? What about South America? What about Germany and Switzerland's influences on our music?'. I think the roots of our music in North America are a lot deeper than a lot of ignorant people, maybe in Nashville, think it is. I try to get into that a little on this record."

Cue: Scots/Irish/Anglo folk ballads, Swiss yodelling, German accordions, Hawaiian steel guitars, Mexican corridos... Heck, with astute artistic license Russell places Johnny-Behind-The-Deuce in Angola Prison and The State Prison Farm in Sugarland, TX, so he can introduce Alan Lomax's field recordings of Lead Belly singing *When I Was A Cowboy* and Moses (Clear Rock) Platt riffing on *St. James Hospital*.

"I wanted to give a nod to African-Americans because a lot of cowboys were black," says Russell. "An African-American cowboy [Charley Willis] supposedly wrote *Goodbye Old Paint*."

"People are not capable of writing songs like that anymore. The melodies alone on *The Red River Valley*, *Home On The Range*, *Old Paint* are magnificent. They come out of the folk tradition. With the possible exception of

[Ian] Tyson, I defy anybody to write songs like that. They are so good. You know, Phil Spector said 20 years ago people are not writing songs anymore they are writing ideas. And I defy anybody who thinks they can write anything better than *Old Paint* or the old Irish songs, *Raglan Road* or *Carrickfergus*. Who's writing stuff like that? God, those are big songs."

Mexican folklore also plays an integral role in the Tom Russell canon. He may even owe his career to *Gallo del Cielo*—his magnificent corrido that recounts the exploits of a fighting rooster who tragically falls one fight short of immortality. Written in 1978, he had all but given up on music a year later. Driving a taxi in New York City one fateful night, though, he picked up the Grateful Dead's Robert Hunter. Hunter was on his way to a gig at The Bitter End in Greenwich Village. They talked about songwriting and Russell sang *Gallo del Cielo* a cappella. Hunter was so impressed he asked Russell to open for him a few weeks later at The Lone Star Cafe. That vote of confidence clearly stiffened Russell's artistic resolve. Both Joe Ely and Ian Tyson recorded *Gallo del Cielo* and they sing it on *The Rose of Roscrae*.

Ana Gabriel, "probably the most famous female singer in Mexico," adds a snatch of a second corrido, *Valentine de La Sierra*—an old boundless ballad about a revolutionary in the time of Pancho Villa (1878-1923).

"It's the mystery and the story that attracts me to those long songs. I was never so much a love-song writer. Ninety-five per cent of songs that are written are about love. I always liked stories. I'm a frustrated fiction writer."

"I was influenced a little by Dylan and Ian Tyson because I'm of another generation. I think these guys are such strong writers, like [Gordon] Lightfoot and Joni Mitchell. They had a very deep understanding of folk music. I see a lot of kids today who love music but don't show up like



Ana Gabriel



Ian Tyson and Tom Russell: circa 1978

Dylan did, already knowing a 1,000 folk songs. They don't have as much to draw on."

But while Russell's enthusiasm for Dylan waned, somewhat, somewhere between *Desolation Row* and *Beyond The Horizon*, it becomes abundantly clear how long and deep his respect for Tyson runs. They've collaborated numerous times in the past, of course, most memorably on *Navajo Rug*, *Claude Dallas*, *The Banks of The Musselshell*, *The Rose of the San Joaquin*, and *When The Wolves No Longer Sing* on *The Rose of Roscrae*. But Russell's reverence long predates their working rapport.

"While my father and older brother were drawn to the rodeos, racetracks, and the Los Angeles Horse and Mule Auction, I was sneaking in the back door of The Ash Grove, a folk club on Melrose in Hollywood, where I first saw Ian & Sylvia. I was a teenage wannabe songwriter, bone-dumb in the ways of the music business.

"I got to see Mississippi John Hurt there. I got to see Mance Lipscomb, Ramblin' Jack Elliott quite a bit. Lightnin' Hopkins. All these great black bluesmen that weren't around for much longer. And I got to see Ian & Sylvia really up close. They were very powerful and you can hear it on their records. They hardly did anything slow and light. Everything blew you away. They always had a good guitar player with them. Ian, from the get-go, was probably the strongest, most melodic singer that ever

came out of the new folk movement. He could sing the hell out of anything, be it *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* or *Four Strong Winds*.

"He's a great lyricist. He taught me good habits and bad habits. We're still pretty close friends but you know Ian: some days a diamond and some days dirt. Some days we'd get along, some days we don't. As a writer and as a singer he's had the most influence on me. From a contemporary of Dylan's, to the man who brought back original cowboy music in the '80s, I just admire what he's done. And to be still out on the road at 80-plus, the same as Haggard, Dylan, Lightfoot, these types of characters we are not creating anymore. They have longevity in them and a deep, deep catalogue."

Toronto-born Bonnie Dobson sprang from the same late '50s, early '60s urban folk revival as Dylan and Ian & Sylvia. Dobson would write *Morning Dew*—a standard covered by everyone from The Grateful Dead to Robert Plant. Having left Los Angeles for Greenwich Village, Russell recalls seeing Dobson in local coffee houses and being name-checked by Dylan. She moved to the U.K., and in the late '80s retired from music to become an administrator at London's Birbeck College. Unbeknownst to Russell, she attended several of his gigs at her neighbourhood venue, Cecil Sharpe House. They eventually became good friends. And she sent him some of her earliest albums.

"[*For the Love of Him*] included *Un Cana-*

diene Errant, which I remembered from Ian & Sylvia's first record. I thought, [*The Rose of Roscrae*] has to have Canadian music. It has to widen the boundaries, especially since it's in French. People ask me about it and I say, 'Where do you think Cajun music came from? From French Acadians!'. So it was cool and it worked very well."

Such attention to detail remains a Tom Russell trademark. An avid reader, he covets colourful characters drawn from a myriad of sources and, spins them into his exceptional songs. The slippery, real-life character Johnny-Behind-The-Deuce he found in one of his innumerable history books on the American West.

"The guy was a protégé of Wyatt Earp in Tombstone. He was known as a minor character, a gambler, a gunslinger. The name comes from playing poker. He helped Wyatt Earp out a few times. I never wanted to go down that road with Wyatt Earp and Billy the Kid. I deal with them in *He Wasn't Bad When He Was Sober*. Most of these guys were just hired guns and scumbags. So I tried to take the piss out of the outlaw myth a little."

A headline and a stunning photo in USA Today in 2009 led to the pivotal personality, Father Damien of Molokai. "It said, 'Saint That Helped The Lepers'. There was this incredible picture of him in 1889, three months before he died of leprosy, he's got a funny-looking

Win a Copy of The Waifs' Beautiful You



We've always had a soft spot for The Waifs down our way. They graced our third hard-copy cover back in 2001 after barnstorming North America on the backs of amazing showcases at Folk Alliance in Vancouver. They've since developed into celebrities in their native Australia and toured with Bob Dylan.

Beautiful You is their first release since *Temptation* in 2011, and they've matured incredibly well over the years, as our

Richard Thornley writes in his review on page 67.

Compass Records has generously donated six copies of this wonderful recording for our readers to win. To earn one, read the column below and email your thoughts to penguineggs@shaw.ca. Put 'Waifs Contest' as the subject.

Please, don't forget to include a mailing address and a proper contact name in order for us to forward your disc.

This is not really a quiz. We simply want your feedback. Tell us what you would like to see in *Penguin Eggs*. Is there anything we are missing? Would you like to read more or less about anything in particular in the magazine? The best answers will win a CD.

Answered by Jaymie Strachan, Louise Kesteven
Contributed Q1: The Martin & Gary Q2:
Liam Wilson Q3: Maura Timokov

And the winners are: Daniela Teplovsky,
Wenderson, Ali Valeriu, St Carmack, Forth,
Chris O'Sullivan, Talbot, Lilliam, Ali

Alma Delano, Wanda Walker, Chris Michael,
Carter, Victoria, Rick Don, Margo, David,
Eric, Ali, James, Anthony, and all.

cowboy hat on and he's staring out. I was transfixed because the story was so far out. Even the church didn't like this guy—he was such a renegade. They thought he was doing it to be holier-than-thou but he was a real guy. John Farrow, Mia Farrow's father, wrote a book about him, *Damien The Leper*."

Inevitably, the introduction of religious elements into this cowboy epic requires an infusion of traditional gospel. And *Rock of Ages* and *Jesus Met The Woman at the Well*—the latter, a close relative of the Child Ballad, *The Maid And The Palmer*, sometimes known as *The Well Below The Valley*—are preceded by Russell's more secular but no less spiritual *I Talk To God* and *Resurrection Mountain*. The former comes blessed with the immensely emotive voice of one-time De Danann chanteuse Maura O'Connell. And the latter soars with the glorious harmonies of The McCrary Sisters, whose recording credits include Johnny Cash, Wynonna Judd, and Bob Dylan.

"*Resurrection Mountain*, that's a great sounding track," says Russell. "The McCrary Sisters brought a new dimension to it. They give it a whole new contemporary gospel feel."

"I worked with them on my last record, [*Mesabi*, 2011]. They told some great stories about Dylan coming over to their house. Dylan's a big fan of southern cooking. He knocked on their door with his bodyguard. The mom answered and said, 'Who's this big guy here? You don't need a bodyguard to come in here,' and yanked Dylan into the kitchen and gave him a huge plate of soul food and told him not to come out until he ate it all."

While Russell put the skeleton of his folk opera together over the best part of two decades, it took Gretchen Peters and Barry Walsh to stiffen its back-

bone with the title track.

"I didn't have *The Rose of Roscrae* until about a year and a half ago. It was going to be one record. I was going to call it *Gunpowder Sunset* and make a western-movie type of a record. I was trying to write an Irish drinking song and came up with the lyric and story but didn't find a melody. I sent it to Gretchen Peters, and she and her husband Barry Walsh wrote the music. The melody worked perfectly. Bang! I had the plot. The kid came from Ireland... I wasn't looking for this song to be the title piece but when Maura O'Connell sang it, it was big enough to carry the load."

Russell considers O'Connell, now Nashville-based, "the voice of Ireland". Given her remarkable treatment of *The Rose of Roscrae*, it's a justifiable assessment.

Russell's family originally came from Templemore, Co. Tipperary, an 11-mile walk from the town of Roscrea*—the original setting for the Oscar-nominated film *Philomena* starring Dame Judith Dench. His aunt, Mary Russell, 90, still lives in the area.

"She used to be an actress. She comes to my gigs and sits in the front row with her driver. She'll stare at me and if it's a song that doesn't interest her she won't clap but she'll wait for a song she likes, like *Raglan Road* or something, and she stands up and yells at me, 'The Russells are shining tonight'."

Given the origins of the major protagonist in this tale, traditional Irish songs maintain a compelling presence throughout. They include Johnny Cash's speed-fuelled take on *Sam Hall*, Russell's dramatic reading of the wonderful *Raglan Road*,



Bonnie Dobson



Maura O'Connell



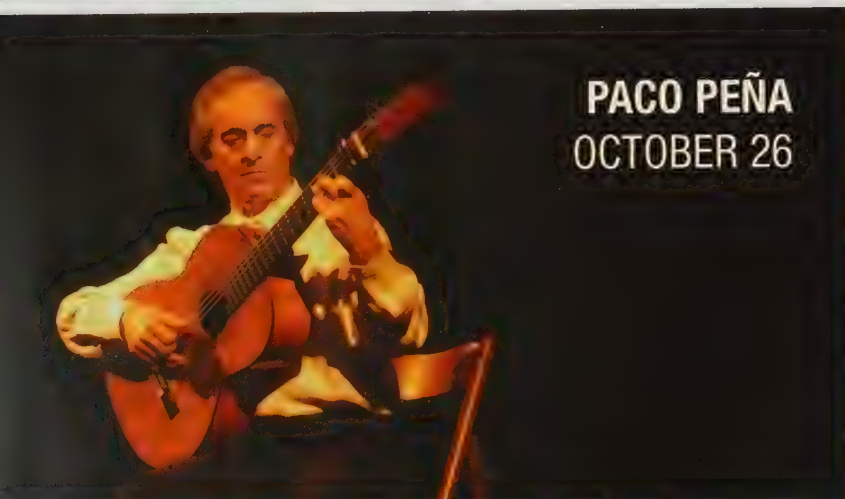
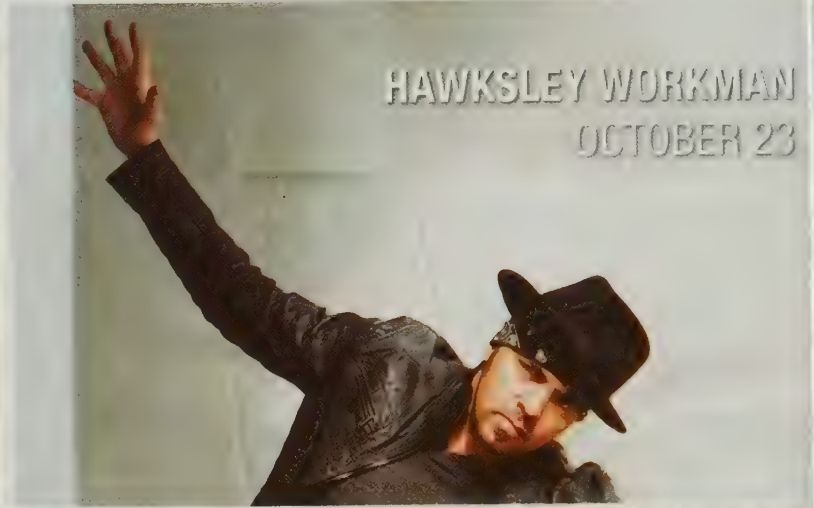
Guy Clark



Finbar Furey

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and his aptly rousing rendition of The Clancy Brothers' rafter-raising sing-along *Isn't It Grand? (To Be Bloody Well Dead)*. The beautiful air, *Carrickfergus*, though, weaves its way in and out of the narrative through Russell, Maura O'Connell, and, curiously, a definitively more grizzled Finbar Furey.

"Finbar, oh my God! I'm a huge fan. I know he's a great piper. And it's great we got a little of his piping on the record. But I love Finbar's voice. I was sitting in a pub in York, England, 15 or 18 years ago. On the jukebox they had Finbar Furey singing Eric Bogle's great song *The Green Fields of France* [Willie MacBride], and he nailed it. It's one of the greatest, heartfelt vocal performances of a great song I have ever heard. I sat there weeping in my beer. And I became a big fan. For me to have Finbar, Johnny Cash, and Ana Gabriel on one record is such an honour."

If Russell considers Maura O'Connell's singing of *The Rose of Roscrae* and *I Talk To God* amongst his personal highlights of this mammoth recording, surely the cameo from the ailing Guy Clark on his *Desperados Waiting For A Train* is its emotional epicentre?

"It chokes me up to think about the morning I spent with Guy about a year ago," says Russell. "He was just out of the hospital after knee surgery. He was at home on his own and he said, 'Come on out, Tom, I'll try and sing a verse or something for your project. Guy had a walker and he was moving very slowly. He hand-rolled a cigarette and he had a coffee and he mostly looked out the window. And we talked about L.A.

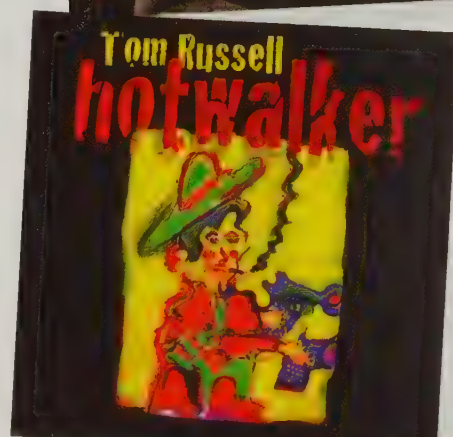
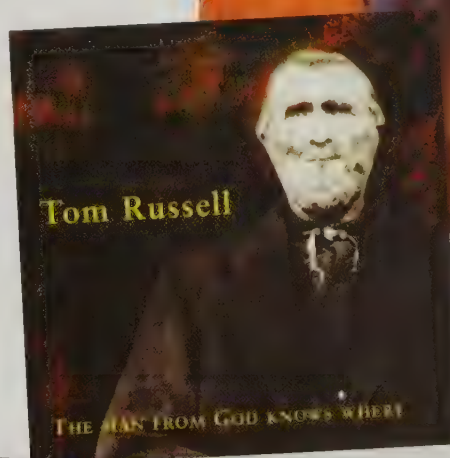
Freeway or *Desperados*. He wanted the company and he showed me the guitars he had made and the paintings he had done. It was very moving. At one point he moved over to the window and looked out. You have to understand, Guy lives in a very suburban part of Nashville. To my mind, I don't know why Guy Clark lives in Nashville. I don't think it's done him any good one way or the other. And here he is looking out at a Burger King or something. And I said, 'Do you miss West Texas, where you came from?'. And he said, 'Yeah, I should have left this shit-hole a long time ago'.

"Then he picked up the guitar and slowly sang one verse of *Desperados*. The guitar fumbles a bit, his hands are shaking a little and he stops and says, 'OK, sorry Tom, I got to do it again.' I said, 'Guy, that was perfect'.

"It was so moving that he had spent that time with me. We went into the studio and Dan Penn showed up, the great songwriter from Muscle Shoals, who wrote great soul hits [*The Dark End of the Street*, *Do Right Woman*, *Do Right Man*...] and he said, 'Let me finish that song. I love that song'. Guy segues into Dan finishing *Desperados Waiting For A Train*. A very magic moment.

"And you know, not one of these people ever asked me for any money, including Maura O'Connell. She wouldn't take any money. She said give it to the local dog pound. Everybody who heard I was trying to explore the roots of cowboy songs just said, 'Use whatever you want'. Even Finbar Furey. Imagine that. Unbelievable."

Combined, all these unifying elements now complete a three-part song cycle that began with the celebrated *The Man From God Knows Where* (1999), which follows the migration of Russell's pioneering ancestors from Ireland



and Norway as they settle in America. It features such wonderful singers and musicians as Dave Van Ronk, Dolores Keane, Iris DeMent, and Annbørg Lien.


The second installment, *Hotwalker* (2005), pays tribute to American literary rebels Jack Kerouac, Edward Abbey, and Charles Bukowski and their musical equivalents, Woody Guthrie, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, and Dave Van Ronk—Russell's kindred spirits.

"I've always felt an outsider here in the States," says Russell. "Just like Bukowski. Just like the Beats. Just like Dylan in a way, turning his back on protest songs, moving in directions he wanted to move in, whether it was good or bad, Christianity or whatever, and getting booed for it his whole career.

"I never went to Nashville. I always thought the line you had to stand in to sell out was too long. I never felt part of a community, so to speak, where you say yes to stuff that you really don't believe in. It's refreshing to be an outsider if you can still produce."

Clearly.

* *Roscrae* is actually spelled *Roscree*. But Johnny Dutton/Johnny-Behind-The-Duece had so many knocks to the head his memory is fragmented. That's Tom Russell's story and he's sticking to it.



The Penguin Eggs Interview

Geoff Muldaur

Photo: By John Cooke

There really is nobody out there who is quite like Geoff Muldaur.

A quintessential cult figure, his whimsical musical journey has taken him down some intriguing paths, from early days with the Jim Kweskin Jug Band to a jaunt playing with Paul Butterfield, eclectic collaborations with his ex-wife Maria

Muldaur and Amos Garrett, to many off-path meanderings that indicated a deep (though never dustily academic) understanding of roots music. When the multi-instrumentalist singer/songwriter helped co-found the Jim Kweskin Jug Band with its namesake singer, they helped lay the ground work for a sub-section of the hippie movement, much to Muldaur's bemusement. With Maria he explored multiple roots forms, and had some fun messing around with Ary Barroso's classic samba, *Brazil*, which was later scooped by Terry Gilliam for the movie of the same name.

His arranging skills came in handy later in his career as he turned to making incidental music for commercials, as well as soundtracks for documentaries and industrial films. Keeping pace with a stream of solo projects and a latter-day return to progressive jug band/blues albums (Geoff Muldaur and the Texas Sheiks), he became intrigued by classical music, especially after the critically acclaimed *Private Astronomy: A Vision of the Music of Bix Beiderbecke*, which came out on Deutsche Grammophon in 2003. Arranging solo Beiderbecke pieces into jazz chamber music, Muldaur discovered a hankering to go full bore into a world he dabbled in when labouring over soundtracks.

Penguin Eggs discussed Muldaur's current fascination with classical music, his time spent with Kweskin and Butterfield, and an unanticipated link to Johnny Rotten.

You're in the process of writing and rehearsing a record with serious classical musicians out in Amsterdam; how is that going?

It's been amazing and frustrating, much different than writing a horn chart for B.B. King, where everyone knows what you mean. With this I have to know the fingerings; it's a whole other deal.

You're now in the company of other writers from the popular music era who have turned to classical, such as Paul McCartney and Elvis Costello.

It's nothing like what I'm doing. They did goose-egg orchestrations, big lush notes. This is real chamber music, and I have a fiddle, piano, and clarinet beside me because I can't just throw notes on a page. You have to know what you're doing. The idea is to carve out something different; I'm going for right out of my bones classical. I'm not up against McCartney or Costello, I'm up against Mozart and Beethoven, and each year they get more and more brilliant the way that Blind Lemon Jefferson does.



Or the way that the Jug Band has for many people.

It all started with the Jug Band, writing those arrangements; well not writing them, yelling them!

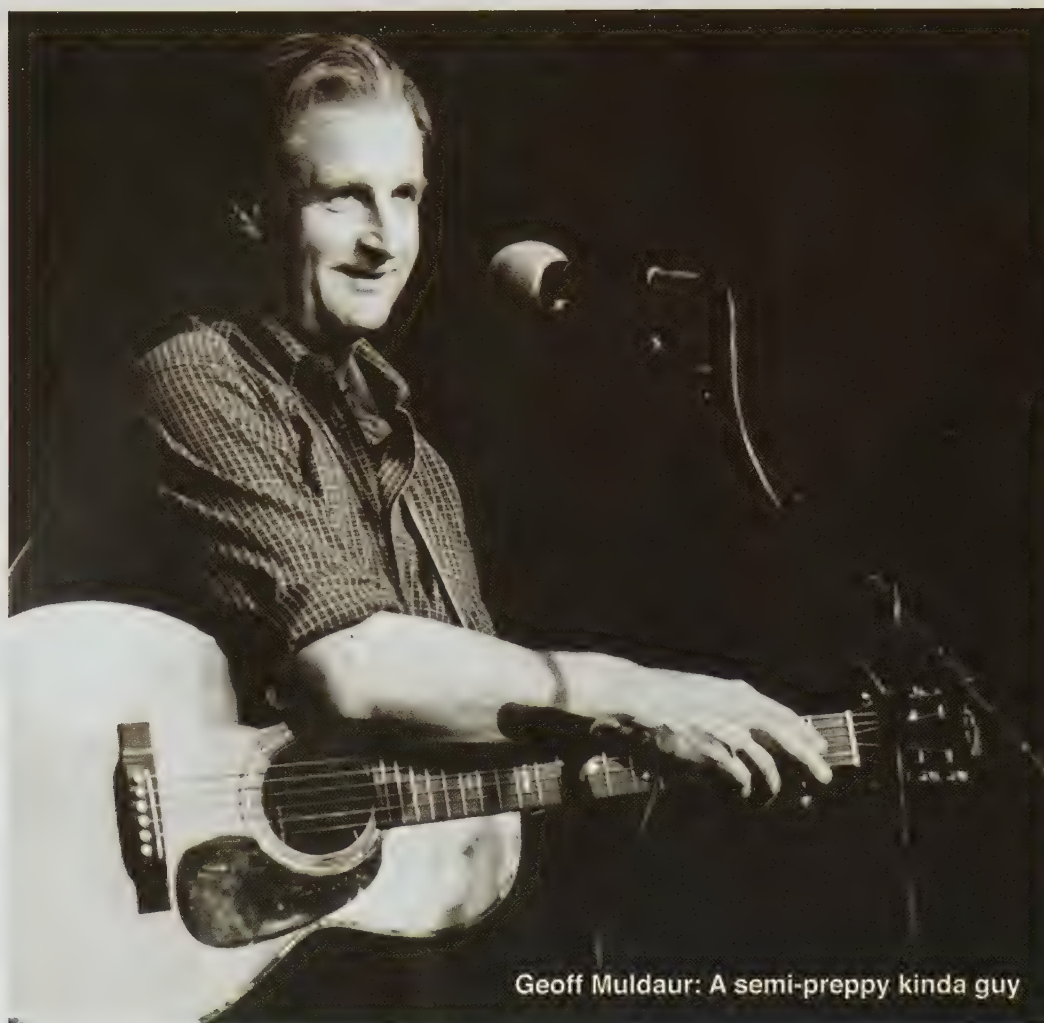
How do you feel when you listen back to those records?

I think, 'Well, that's pretty nutty'. They're pretty good, you know? Of course, over the years I've had the opportunity to hone my craft a little.

Do you think that, for North Americans, jug band music served the same purpose as skiffle music did for the Brits, as an opportunity to get into roots music from ground level?

Maybe a little. Skiffle was more middle of the road, whereas we were somewhat revolutionary, especially in how we dressed, I think. The idea of getting up with a set patter and wearing striped shirts like the folk groups did wasn't something I was interested in. Plus, skiffle was pop sounding. It was fun, and (Lonnie) Donegan was OK, but we were likely to do anything in our music.





Geoff Muldaur: A semi-preppy kinda guy



Paul Butterfield

Rock music was never part of your musical agenda, though, right?

I never liked rock. That doesn't mean I don't like electric music, because I did play with Paul Butterfield's band, but most rock is too easily playable by people who are not brilliant. To me, once you leave the world of sophisticated rhythms and harmonies, like Ray Charles, that's where I stop.

That's part of the appeal for listeners and players—anyone can do it.

Yeah, once again, they go one way and I go another.

You joined Butterfield and his Better Days band in 1972; what did he have to offer to you at the time?

Butterfield was brilliant. I never knew how to listen to a rhythm section until I played with him. He couldn't listen to the rhythm section where the foot of the drum and the bass didn't lock. If they flamed he wanted to run away.

I'm guessing he wasn't into free jazz at all, then.

He liked rooted jazz, maybe Cannonball (Adderley), things like that. If you couldn't find a groove he wasn't into it. You'd be surprised at what he did like, though; he listened to James Taylor and Hall & Oates, maybe for production values or the sounds of instruments. But he never listened to anyone for inspiration; he already had that from a young age.

It would have been strange for you to come from some of the inspired anarchy and looseness of the Jim Kweskin Jug Band to such a tight organization.

That was definitely a switch. In the Jug Band we might stop and start over if we felt like it, whereas in the Butterfield band it was like a high-speed train, just groove, groove, groove, kill, kill, kill. It was a wonderful experience, and I'm alive to talk about it.

But you needed to move on...

He was a brilliant musician, and that was one of the great learning experiences of my life. I had to move on because we weren't playing on the road a lot, and that's where we made good coin. We were sitting in

You resisted the prevailing trends of the time.

Sure; I was never a hippie. That music was unbearable to me, still is, and we never went there. I still dress the same way I always did, really, a semi-preppy kinda guy.

Were you more into the Beat ethos that helped birth the whole hippy movement?

Maybe a little, but unlike them I liked having a clean apartment. We talk about this now; it was about being with friends, having good meals, listening to and playing music together. It's the same now when we get together. We have our geezer picking parties that we invite younger people to but it's still as much about the food where you'd be asking, 'Where'd you get these oysters?'. It was about not wanting to be part of the herd. We never bought into the fashion statement aspect of music. I think one of the funny things about the punk era was kids dressing the same way, as if they were making a statement about being anti-establishment and individual but when you pull back and look it's just another style. They were all trying to look like each other. I guess what it comes down to is that if everyone goes one way I take a left turn. Maybe that was a little bit of a Beat thing.

Johnny Rotten of The Sex Pistols shares many of your sentiments about punk kids all dressing the same way.

Really? Seriously? (Laughs) Well, that's one comparison I'm jumping on: Muldaur and Johnny Rotten.

Woodstock making records. I was heading downhill on drugs and alcohol. I was a major participant in all of that, so part of my moving to Martha's Vineyard (in the mid-'70s) was to get away from that, but instead I took it with me. It took me another 10 years to get into the repair shop.

So there actually was something you had in common with the hippies?

What? Self-destruction? (Laughs) I remember I was such a crank that when we played the Avalon and Fillmore I'd make them turn off the strobe lights. They hated me but the strobes freaked me out. I was a boozier, not an acid guy.

Your weirdness took form not in drug use but in writing and arranging; taking a song like the classic *Aquarela do Brasil* [retitled as simply *Brazil*] and putting your own spin on it, as you did with the first album (*Pottery Pie*) with your wife, Maria. I guess that really is going your own way.

You know, I tried to talk Butterfield into something like that. I suggested he do *When You Wish Upon a Star* with a break in it, like a Little Walter break. He didn't have a similar sense of humour, though. But sure, given a chance to mess around, it gets pretty interesting, I think.

It came back over a decade and a half later as the title track to Terry Gilliam's film, also called *Brazil*. How did that feel?

It made me feel like someone is actually listening. It also generated some money for me, which is very nice as well. You know, I talked to Gilliam after *Brazil* came out and he said that the Monty Python guys used to come into the office, put on our version and then get on their knees and pray to it. I just thought, 'OK, I consider this to be a plateau'. The movie was named after the insanity of the tune; it wasn't that they needed a tune called *Brazil* for a movie called *Brazil*, it was the seed for the movie, and the movie had nothing to do with the country.

You record a song in 1969 and it comes back to you 17 years later in a manner in which you didn't expect it. That's high praise.

It was an honour! You do stuff that most record companies don't want you to do, or maybe your band mates are saying, 'Oh, no, no, Muldaur, please don't do this', and you go, 'I'm telling you, this will work', and it eventually finds the right connection. That feels good.

You still get out on the road with your old friends now and again.

Well, it took Jim [Kweskin] years to come out and play but he's a great picker and he sounds almost exactly the same. He's 75 and he's still singing in all the original keys, and he swings like a bandit. I love playing with him. I play with [guitarist] Amos Garrett from time to time, and I used to play with [Butterfield bassist] Bill Rich from time to time. Stephen Bruton [who

played with Muldaur in the Texas Sheiks] has passed away. That's a tough thing as you get older. They don't just leave; it's not just, 'Oh, he's a good guitar player', it's an entire way of looking at music that goes away. They're irreplaceable. All the more reason to be happy with the classical world, where players are more interchangeable.

It sounds as though part of the appeal in devoting yourself to writing chamber music is in removing yourself from the reality of losing musical friends.

It is painful. There's also the reality of the fact that you could get a good band together now but how many people would still be there in five years time? And how many would continue to have the real stuff? It's like, we were so good yesterday, but now? I like this new thing where I work with so many top classical players.

What are you to these classical players? How do they look at you?

Depends on who it is. I have lack of craft compared to the people they normally deal with, like a hot-shot arranger who knows how to talk to them. Others realize that they're looking at good music and they decide to give me a hand. Europeans can be somewhat reserved but Americans push back a little and ask whether I actually am intending what they see on the page. I prefer that.

How do you balance the two musical worlds you inhabit? Is there a clear preference for you?

No, I enjoy both. When I get on the road I go, 'Oh god, why do I do this, it's always the same', and then I realize how much I love it. I really love meeting people who saw me 48 years ago, and my music means so much to them. I especially like playing new places, where they haven't heard my new ways of doing things, so I try and do that as much as possible. It pays the rent (said wryly.) There are musicians out there who have worked hard and attained stardom but I never did, and I still get to do all these things that I want to do. I'm very lucky, indeed.



The Jug Band.
Top row, left to right:
Richard Greene, Jim
Kweskin, Bill Keith,
Fritz Richmond and
Maria and Geoff
Muldaur

Reviews



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67 The Waifs



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Daby Toure

Amonafi (Once Upon A Time) (Cumbancha)



I've always liked Daby Toure's recordings. His singing voice

is exquisite—that rich tenor, over-dubbed with his own effortless falsetto. His guitar playing is accomplished—great licks, rocking rhythms. He also covers bass, keys, and drums on this record.

Daby Toure announces, "With this new album, I approach what I like most: soul, pop, music we can sing beyond borders".

So why am I so dyspeptic over the new album? We could, indeed, follow the bouncing ball and sing along—if we could stand it.

OK, so I'm the grinch who doesn't like sunny melodies floating like bubbles on soft breezes. There is an awful lot of la-la on this disc. Personally, I've been running the other way most of my life.

It's great to have the printed lyrics as well as expanded explanations for the songs, which are written in a variety of languages, including phrases in English. For me, the problem was trying to grapple with the gravity of the words, dark lessons from history,

admonishing social ills, while the tunes skipped off like bubble gum rock.

The songs that work best are those which seem to have a deeply personal connection to Toure himself. Toure recounts hearing a song in his childhood sung by the theatre group his father directed, a stirring a cappella song about throwing off the servitude of colonialism. Finally, a melding of sound and intent. Toure's care-free tone works well with songs such as *Kille*, a nostalgic remembrance of village life by the river, evenings of dancing and firelight, a way of life now gone.

— By Lark Clark

Barbeque Bob

The Rough Guide To Blues Legends:

Barbecue Bob (World Music Network)



What I noticed on first listen to this rather extensive retrospective of

Barbeque Bob—one of the most colourful characters of the early '20s blues scene—was the particularly melodic nature of his music. A few tunes in, I realized he was playing a 12-string guitar, which when played straight or with a slide made some of the happiest

blues I've ever heard.

Outsold only by Bessie Smith and Blind Willie Johnson, Robert Hicks, a.k.a. Barbecue Bob, recorded more than 60 tracks for Columbia Records and became one of their best-selling "race series" artists on the label.

Born to a poor family of sharecroppers in Georgia, Bob learned to play music from family and friends and over the years would perform at dances, parties, and picnics in the Atlanta area. In 1926, Hicks became a chef in a barbecue joint where he would cook, serve, and perform his happy, melodic Piedmont blues to the very satisfied customers. Eventually becoming a local celebrity, Hicks was noticed by a Columbia Records talent scout, who gave him the opportunity to record under his new celebrity name, Barbecue Bob. Dressed all in chef whites in his promo material and on album covers, his gimmick got him a lot of attention, which afforded him a wider audience than most and great sales.

His slippery bottleneck playing and a frailing technique, which owed more to the clawhammer banjo than standard blues guitar—all on a 12-string guitar—created a vibe more celebratory than dark,

which set him apart from the pack at the time.

His sense of humour shines through much of this vast repertoire, which is wonderful and sad as much his music has been overlooked over the years while other East-coast players such as Blind Willie McTell and Buddy Moss are far better known. Despite not being as popular today, his original and witty compositions had a huge influence on many of the blues greats that followed. After four years of tasting great success, Barbeque Bob's life was cut short at age 29 by pneumonia but remains one of the true innovative pioneers of the Atlanta blues scene. This is a wonderful collection to be listened to repeatedly.

— Michael Wrycraft

Lindi Ortega

Faded Gloryville (Last Gang Records)



Don't let the little-girl quality in Lindi Ortega's voice fool you. *Faded*

Gloryville expresses 100-per-cent adult emotions. And she knows how to engage an audience with an album that manages to be thoughtful but not depressing.

The starkly beautiful title track provides a glimpse of an up-and-down musical career: "*There ain't no stars in Faded Gloryville / we've chased our dreams into the ground*". The catchy *Run Down Neighbourhood* will fill a dance floor. Recorded in three different blocks with three different producers, the project still manages a cohesiveness. The Dave Cobb



DAVID FRANCEY

THREE-TIME
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Mar 2	Burlington Performing Arts Centre	Burlington, ON	Apr 10	Upstairs Cabaret	Victoria, BC
Mar 3	Showplace Performance Centre	Peterborough, ON	Apr 15	Live Well Nightclub	Nissawa, MN
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Mar 22	Nancy Appleby Theatre	Athabasca, AB	May 14	Abbott Hall	Tamworth, ON
Mar 23	The Root	Lloydminster, SK	May 25	Grace Hartman Amphitheatre	Sudbury, ON



* David will be touring with (L-R) Chris Coole, Darren McMullen, and Mark Westberg

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sessions lean to toe-tappers; the Ben Tanner/John Paul White sessions, recorded in Muscle Shoals, include a torchy version of the Bee Gees' *To Love Somebody*; and the Ortega/John Paul White tune *Someday Soon*, which will make Ortega fans out of anyone who loves Patsy Cline. The Colin Linden-produced tunes have an old-timey, country flavour. At 37 minutes total run time, Ortega may be adhering a little too closely to the 'leave them wanting more' philosophy but it works.

– By Ruth Blakely

Daniel Romano

If I've Only One Time Askin' (New West)



Reformed indie-rocker Daniel Romano's latest LP rises into view

on a zephyr of sweet strings and swooning steel, raising the possibility that he's tapping into the same lush retro-pop vein as Father John Misty, but the Welland, ON, native's purposes couldn't be more at odds with the good padre's bone-deep snarkiness. *If I've Only One Time Askin'* will undoubtedly bring to mind the classic country pantheon, whether it's the Willie-esque gurgle at the back of Romano's throat on *I'm Gonna Teach You*; the sudden George Jonesian surges of emotion on *You Go Your Way (and I'll Go Blind)*; the hint of Stompin' Tom vocal fry on *Two Word Joe*; the sober, Lightfoot-esque stateliness of the title track, or the prevailing Gram Parsons space-cowboy vibe. But it never seems less than heartfelt, a beautifully orchestrated distillation of one fella's love for country's masters. And while such homages have cluttered the landscape since John Fogerty declared himself a Blue Ridge Mountain Ranger, Romano ups the game, writing his own truckstop jukebox hits—a dozen, in fact, packed into 40-odd minutes. More than halfway through the 2015 roots music season, they make a strong case for best-of-the-year contention.

– By Scott Lingley



Slocan Ramblers

Coffee Creek (Independent)



From the banjo/mandolin duet in the title song that kicks off this album,

I was hooked. This is mighty fine bluegrass, and you can hear the progress in this sophomore album from the first one.

This young quartet of Toronto pickers operates pretty much in the traditional vein but is developing its own sound that features a good deal of ensemble playing. About half of the 14 tunes are originals, with a mixture of instrumentals and songs. *April's Waltz*, featuring the mandolin of Adrian Gross, is a standout, while bassist Alistair Whitehead travels pretty close musically to the Slocan Valley with his song *Elk River*.

The cover tunes are well picked, too, in more ways than one. They do a wonderful, haunting job on Woody Guthrie's *Pastures of Plenty* and a rollicking version of The Delmore Brothers' *Mississippi Shore*.

The Ramblers' fame is spreading far from Hogtown, and they're doing some, well, rambling. Their busy touring schedule taking them from Dawson City to West Palm

Beach is a just reward for the hard work.

– By Mike Sadava

Sam Lee & Friends

The Fade in Time (The Nest Collective)



Here's an interesting idea. Take a collection of traditional songs;

many collected from Britain's travelling folk, and 'rewild' them. That's what English folk music's Young Turk, Sam Lee says he's doing with his new disc. There's a few dictionary definitions of rewilding, but the one that seems most apropos is 'the deliberate release of a species into the wild'. Seeing that folk songs have been domesticated to their detriment, he sets them free by imbuing them with unusual sounds and African, Indian and Asian musical motifs. He adds sampled field recordings, choir singing and a brass band to turn them from their over-civilised state into something more primitive and startling. His singing is of a crooning sort, in the baritone register, which could have cast him as a kind of folky Bing Crosby, were it not for the fact that his choice of musical setting ranges from the unexpected

to the shocking. He spins tales of love and loss, treachery and deceit and sensuousness and heartbreak. There's never a dull moment. Not everything he tries comes off, though. Overall the album has a fragmented feel. It's as if there's nothing with enough cohesive mass to keep the flying multitude of creative urges in a perceptible orbit. Then again, maybe that's the whole point. I'm reminded of a phrase from the *Last Tango in Paris* movie about taking a 'flying fuck at a rolling donut'. As Kurt Vonnegut, coiner of that phrase clearly understood, sometimes that's what you have to do to break the humdrum and shatter preconceptions. Maybe Sam Lee's succeeded and maybe he hasn't. One thing's for sure. It makes for compelling listening while you are making up your mind. Meanwhile, the critics and mavens of the British folk scene are unanimous in their opinion that he totally nailed it. I'm going to have to listen a few hundred more times before I know for sure.

– By Tim Readman.

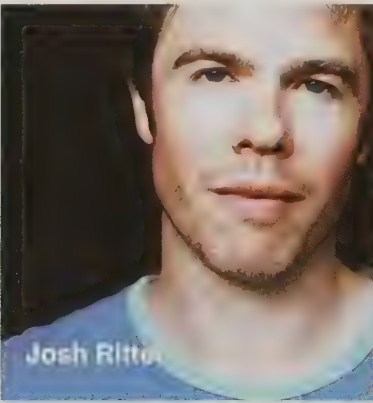
Josh Ritter

Sermon on the Rocks (Thirty Tigers)



Ritter has taken to calling it "messianic oracular honky-tonk", which

might seem needlessly vague for a man who doesn't own up to any Dylan worship but it actually perfectly nails the tone of the singer/songwriter's latest release, *Sermon on the Rocks*. Cries of "fire is coming, fire is coming" over a tense, insistent piano pulse on the





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opening track *Birds of the Meadow* give the enterprise the feeling of a coming apocalypse that might be interior or exterior depending on whose listening, while *Home-coming* is a sweet little half-spoken vignette that might have escaped from Bruce Springsteen after a prolonged Van Morrison listening session. *Getting Ready to Get Down*, the first single, is a bit of a rocker, a tongue twister of a lyric, speed sung in a half bemused tone by Ritter.

Parts of the album seem like they could have been intended for his so-called 2013 break-up album *The Beast In Its Tracks*, while other songs sound like a man with a bit more peace in his heart; however it was assembled, it makes for one of the most immediately satisfying albums of Ritter's career.

– By Tom Murray

Emily Portman

Coracle (Furrow Records)



Coracle

Producer Andy Bell worked with Oasis, but it's hard to

imagine anything further away on the musical spectrum from that, than the contents of this promising English folk musician's latest. There's a sense of enchantment pervading this album of original Portman songs. Her vocal delivery is ethereal and in places somewhat reminiscent of Becky of the Unthanks. Lucy Farrell and Rachel Newton, add to this somewhat spooky atmosphere with their otherworldly vocal harmonies as well as their subtly sinister contributions on fiddle and harp. Portman's lyrical themes revolve around images of birds, trees and the natural world, stories of birthing and mothering, and evocations of death and loss. It can get very bleak but is never bland, potent but never pompous, and delicate but never weak. Like the aforementioned Unthanks there is an unsettling quality to the music, which is full of tensions from which we never quite get released.



Emily Portman

A refreshingly original piece of work which demands and rewards close attention.

– By Tim Readman

Scott Cook & The Long Weekends

Go Long (Groove Revival)



Writing for this magazine back in 2009, this reviewer mentioned

Scott Cook as a troubadour to watch. He's made several more strong discs since then and this latest, his eighth I believe, is unique in that it brings together a collection his more light-hearted songs that didn't seem to fit his more serious discs. He's compiled



Scott Cook

them in a nice package with a thick photo and lyric booklet that seems to reflect perfectly a hot, long-weekend summer afternoon at a riverside Edmonton park playing Beersbie (Frisbee with beer)—rules included in the booklet) with his friends. The recording emphasis, too, was on having fun and the mood certainly comes through in the music with subjects as diverse as a teasing look at the sort of hoary old song nuggets sung around campfires, taking a lifer for a wife, the lighter and darker sides of drinking, with good-natured digs at philanthropists, end-of-the-world predictions, and a replacement song for *Happy Birthday*. It's just the sort of music to play on an afternoon like that and his good-natured hoser philosophy shines through admirably. To his own work, he adds songs by Trevor Mills, Corin Raymond, and Scotty Dunbar. Have one or two brews on a hot afternoon and enjoy!

– By Barry Hammond

Fraser & Girard

Fraser & Girard (Independent)



This album is predictable. Predictably warm and wonderful!

What on earth would you expect from two great veterans of the Canadian folk

music scene, with an album of all original tunes being produced by, arguably, the best folk/roots producer in Canada? Allan Fraser, solo now for many years, was in the seminal Canadian folk duo Fraser & Debolt, along with the fiery, cantankerous force-of-nature that was Daisy Debolt. Marianne Girard has been a shining light on the Toronto singer/songwriter scene for many years. Both as writers, players, and singers, these two have almost three-quarters of a century of experience behind them and it is evident on this, their debut CD.

Successful solo performers coming together to form duos, trios or bands can be a shaky endeavour indeed. Under perfect conditions the melding of talent, chops and ego can be an artistic win but a time bomb waiting to happen. Witness the Wailin' Jennys, one of Canada's most successful roots "supergroup" trios with harmonies to die for, and their personnel changes.

Finding that magical connection of music and personality melding into a great musical whole can be a difficult thing but listening to Fraser & Girard it all seems so easy breezy.

Sensibilities seem to align perfectly, harmonies blend like butter and the overall feeling is that of a favourite old comfy sweater

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that just feels indescribably good to put on. A real, live folk album with just enough instrumentation and arrangements to highlight the personalities of each song and never overwhelm.

Producer Paul Mills, after many years of producing folk records we now consider classics, has given us a warm and beautiful record that feels like these two have been playing together forever. The musical interaction seems passionate yet effortless, unforced and graceful and makes one want to press the repeat button to squeeze as much out of a listening session as possible.

As for the packaging, I should mention the exquisitely simple photography by Mark Whitcombe. File under: pure, unadulterated folk!

— Michael Wrycraft

Daniel Koulack and Karnel Sawitsky

Fiddle and Banjo: Tunes from the North, Songs from the South (Independent)



I adore this album. The title says exactly what it is, fiddle and banjo, and

Koulack and Sawitsky apply them to a handful of wonderful tunes, and sparkling performances. There are some voices, too, and lots of energy, as on a great, rousing arrangement of *Little Birdie*. But there are lots of delicate, surprising moments, too. *Lullaby* is quiet, restrained, and absolutely gorgeous. Just a fiddle and a banjo hanging out together for a while, having a conversation about this and that.

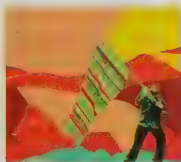
Not all the pieces are traditional but everything feels of a piece; even despite that, ones that are traditional come to us from a diverse range of traditions: Metis, Quebecois, old-time, and Appalachian. You may think you don't need to hear *Groundhog* again but these guys prove that you do. *The Old French Set* marries a number of tunes and styles that you could hear in Quebec on any

given night. There, as elsewhere, the arrangements are deceptively complex, holding interest no matter how familiar the tunes may be. The album ends with a highlight, a wonderfully sparse presentation of Blind Alfred Reed's *How Can a Poor Man Stand Such Times and Live*. With music like this, apparently.

— By Glen Herbert

Boogat

Neo Reconquista (Maisonette)



Boogat is the nom-de-plume of Mexican-born, Montreal-based

hip-hop MC Daniel Russo Garrido. This is the followup to his 2013 release *El Dorado Sunset*, which earned him two Felix Awards, including one for Best World Music Album. Garrido's lyrical flow is smooth and assured, and as the album title suggests, his themes often have a strong political bent. Backed by a live band, replete with horn section, he and his main musical collaborator, DJ/producer Ghislain Poirier, combine programmed beats with the band's organic sounds to create tracks that draw on a variety of tropical styles, including cumbia, mambo, salsa, and reggae.

While the language barrier will be a challenge for anglophones, the musical vibes here are universal and stand-out tracks such as the dancehall-inflected *Londres* (a collaboration with fellow Montrealer Peirre Kwenders) and

the funky, guitar-riff-driven *Wena*, are sure to win over dance floor denizens of many stripes. Following up on an award-winning album can be daunting but Boogat has definitely risen to the occasion with this release.

— By Ian Menzies

Old Man Luedecke

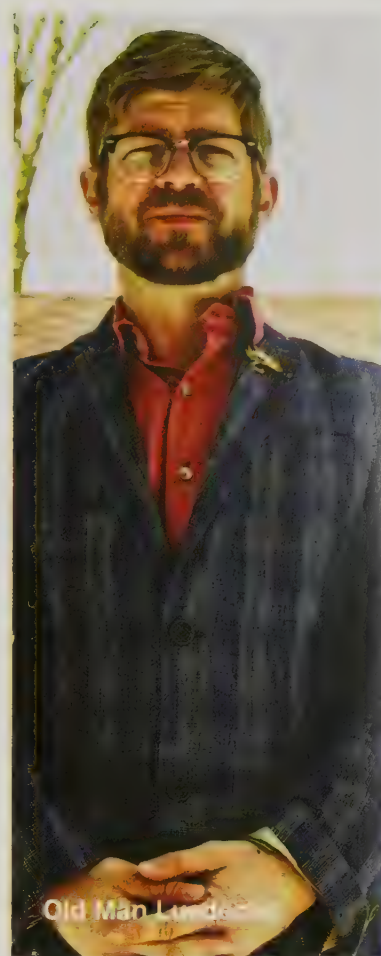
Domestic Eccentric (True North Records)



Domestic Eccentric is a welcome extension of what Old Man

Luedecke was doing on his last project, *Tender Is the Night*. His writing is maturing, though it has always been very strong. He's also found his sound, something that perhaps was a bit confused on his earlier albums. Here, as on *Tender*, he is produced and joined by Tim O'Brien, and the pairing couldn't be more natural. Musically, it's a fantastic mix of musicianship and inspiration.

If anything distinguishes this album, it's the honesty. Luedecke is older now—he's had children since the last release—and he's writing about the experience of fatherhood, parenthood, with an unflinching desire to present the full range of experiences that it brings. Humour is part of it. In *The Briar and the Rose* and *The Early Days* he sings of the difficulties of raising young children—the exhaustion, conflict, difficulty, isolation, work—while poignantly underlining the joys of which we need to be reminded. *Now We*



Got a Kitchen should be required listening for parents, and is as gut-wrenching as it is confirming. It's also strikingly beautiful.

Luedecke has always been seduced by quirky humour, and it's something he does well. That's represented here, as in *Hate What I Say*, but it's the serious material that stands out in this collection. In *Brightest on the Heart* he quotes a number of old-time songs, and deftly engages with that musical tradition. It's a delightful, thoughtful album with a nice range of material that, nevertheless, hangs together very nicely.

— By Glen Herbert

Jesse Cook

One World (eOne)



Juno Award-winning Canadian guitarist and composer Jesse

Cook has released his twelfth album, and ninth studio album, with *One World*, a collection of 11 instrumental tracks demon-





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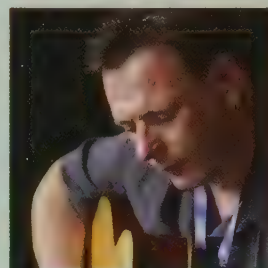
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strating his approach to nuevo flamenco music, with influences from flamenco, rumba, jazz, and world music. Cook, who was born in Paris and started as a classical guitarist, has developed a hybrid style that combines classical, jazz, and flamenco with improvisational passages and which, increasingly, incorporates electronics in the mix. This is especially evident on *Steampunk Rickshaw*. The album cover depicts an ancient tree and Cook compares the tree to all the branches and roots of music that have combined in his unique style, including music he has absorbed from his trips around the world. The tracks on the album include *Taxi Brazil*, *Bombay Slam*, *To Your Shore*, *When Night Falls*, *Steampunk Rickshaw*, and *Breath*. The tunes are varied yet come together to create a harmonious whole. The most unusual track is *Tommy and Me*, a duet with steel-string guitarist Tommy Emmanuel.

On the whole, this is an easy-listening album with a bit more

punch and character than comparable New Age guitar albums. The playing is excellent and the album is well produced and would make a happy addition to your guitar-music collection, provided you

don't mind some electronically supplemented sounds.

– By Gene Wilburn

The Paperboys
At Peace With One's Ghosts (Independent)

Vancouver's The Paperboys, a Tom Landa-led project, have survived more than 20 years with numerous band members coming and going over time. Always innovative, always changing and experimenting, they started so long ago with Celtic-influenced tunes, progressing to mixing in Mexican and other Latin flavours—and every rhythm in between it seems.

It's worked for them so far and continues to do so. From the opening lovely fiddle-laced love song *Back To You* to the banjo-driven,

uptempo instrumental closer *The Pugilist*, not a foot is set wrong. When they play as a band backing Mr. Landa's lovely vocals, The Paperboys fill and support tastefully as a band should. When they crank out a set of tunes they play with flair, style, and energy—becoming the perfect dance band. Kalissa Landa delivers tasteful fiddle throughout and then takes a turn with a lovely lead vocal on the seductive, slightly funky *Don't Want To Know*. Geoffrey Kelly, as always, shines on flute and whistles, as do the guest horn section players.

City of Chains, a lyrically dense song arranged and performed flawlessly, is the highlight of the album for me; it stayed in my head long after first hearing. After 20 years, The Paperboys used their strengths and quirks as a band to full advantage. It is not surprising, then, that they are at peace with their ghosts. A terrific album from a terrific band.

– By les siemieniuk

Vishtèn
Terre Rouge (Les Éditions Du Corfuis)

The title of the new disc from this powerhouse trio of multi-instrumentalists

is taken from the red soil of their home islands: the Magdalens and Prince Edward Island. Twin sisters Emmanuelle and Pastelle Leblanc and Pascal Miousse, along with producer, engineer, mixer and guest musician Éloi Painchand, have put together what must rate as their best disc yet. Emmanuelle has been studying percussive dance, influenced by friend and La Bottine Souriante dancer Sandy Silva and other performers, adding that to their already heady mix of mouth music, which sister Pastelle had been delving into, and local fiddle traditions Pascal had been exploring. The result is a heady and deeply rhythmic disc of melodies in which violin, mandolin, guitar, voices, accordion, piano, bodhrán, jaw harp, whistles, and



bass synth meld into a whirling flurry of Acadian song that is both traditional and fiercely up-to-the-moment. You don't have to be Francophone or Celtic to enjoy the music that partakes of both roots, only to have feet and a heart, both of which will be moved by this music. If you can sit still during *Corandina*, *Joe Féraïlle*, or remain unmoved by *Je Vous Aime Tant*, *Coeur En Mer*, or *Sarazine* you must be dead.

– By Barry Hammond

Brandi Carlile
The Firewatcher's Daughter (ATO Records/MapleMusic Recordings)

This is the sixth disc from this singer/songwriter from Ravensdale, WA, and, as always, the biggest asset on it is her clear, resonant voice with its compressed, plaintive tone. The songs themselves are a flurry of individual, short, tight sculptures, as if editing and concision were the point of this outing. Their tone runs the gamut from the full-on, hard-rock workout of *Mainstream Kid*, with thundering drums and biting, fuzzed guitar, to the nice acoustic guitar setting of *Wilder (We're Chained)* with ac-

companied cello. *Blood Muscle Skin & Bone* has complex, shifting rhythms and perhaps the best lyrical craftsmanship occurs in *The Stranger At My Door* (which contains the disc's title reference), as well as a musical quotation from *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* and an abrupt electric guitar feedback ending. For fans who haven't experienced Carlile before, perhaps the most listener-friendly cut is *Murder In The City* with its accessible harmonies and more lovely cello accompaniment. Her musicians may bemoan the lack of credits given on the disc but I'm her many fans will revel in another slice of their favourite singer.

– By Barry Hammond



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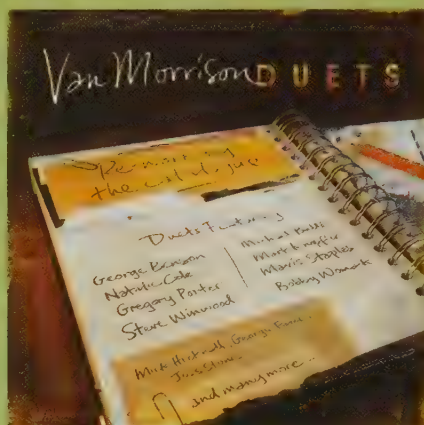
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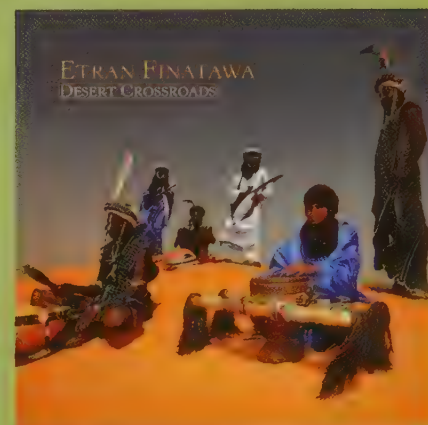
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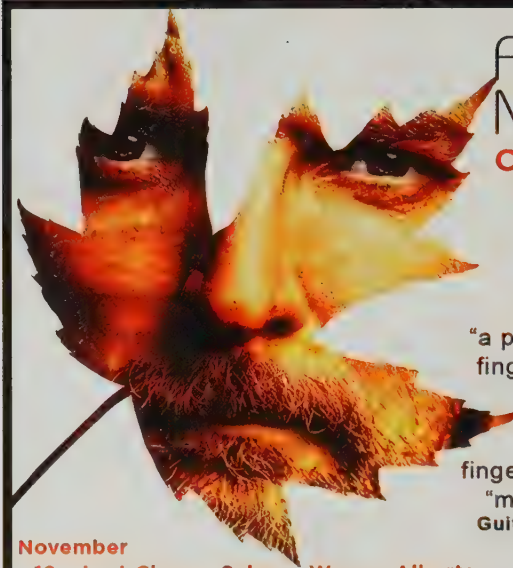
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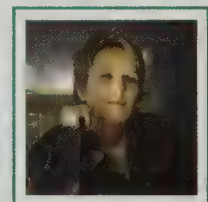
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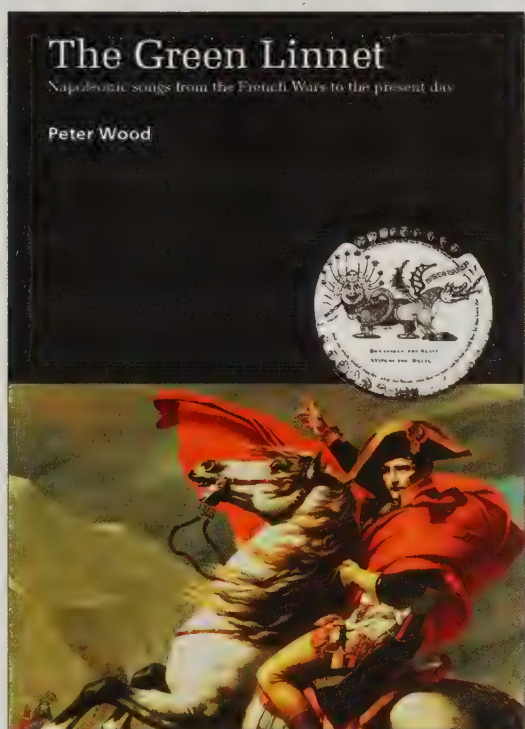
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Stéphanie Lépine

Photo: Jean-François Branchaud et Stéphanie Lépine

Une violoniste talentueuse de Québec apparaît sur trois nouveaux albums qui mettent en valeur ses racines traditionnelles.

Par Yves Lambert

Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

Parmi les meilleures violoneuses de sa génération, Stéphanie Lépine a fait paraître deux disques en juillet : un premier, *«La grande ligne»*, presque complètement instrumental en solo avec des invités; un deuxième, *«Habillés en propre»*, en plus chanson et en duo avec Jean-François Branchaud que l'on retrouve à la guitare et non au violon comme il le fait le plus souvent. À cela, Stéphanie ajoute une collaboration sur un autre nouvel album que le banjoïste-guitariste Jean-Paul Loyer avait réalisé avant sa mort en 2009 : *«Ojnaberries et autres banjoritudes»*, qui fut lancé au Festival Mémoire et Racines, toujours en juillet.

Cette dernière création est dans la lignée du disque *«Le messenger»* que le groupe Ojnab avait révélé vers 1993-1994, mais avec plus de musiciens. Jean-Paul Loyer était considéré comme l'un des grands frères rénovateurs du trad québécois : « J'ai fait partie de la deuxième gang de Jean-Paul », raconte Stéphanie. « On avait un immense partage avec lui et dans sa musique, on n'ajoutait pas tant d'harmonies tellement la mélodie allait de soi. On pouvait être deux ou trois à jouer la mélodie et ça fonctionnait ».

Depuis deux décennies, Stéphanie s'est adaptée à tout, du son plus rugueux au plus fin, des influences celtiques de ses débuts aux compositions plus québécoises et à l'éclatement sur le projet *Excès de trad* qu'elle a réalisé en 2010 avec Simon Marion. Son disque *«La grande ligne»* marque un retour aux sources qu'elle relate : « *La grande ligne*, c'est le nom de ma rue à Saint-Liguori dans Lanaudière. Mais ça représente plus que ça : c'est ma région, c'est mon coin et en même temps c'est la grande continuité, la transmission et le goût de cette musique-là ».

C'est un disque enraciné dans son pays et sa famille. À ce sujet, Stéphanie raconte une belle histoire, comme on en trouve encore dans Lanaudière : « Dans ma famille, il y avait beaucoup de violoneux. Joffre-Albert Ricard, le père de ma grand-mère maternelle était le violoneux de la paroisse. Ses fils jouent pratiquement tous du violon. Plusieurs ne sont plus là, mais il y a mon oncle Gilles avec qui j'ai joué. Il joue encore à 78 ans. Un autre de mes oncles avait enregistré mon oncle Noël vers 1988-

89 et j'ai accès à ça. On y reconnaît la petite tournure des Ricard qui jouaient bien plus sur le bout de l'archet avec le violon accoté sur la poitrine. Le coup d'archet est fin avec la super mélodie... Ma mère joue aussi».

Elle continue comme ça en énumérant plusieurs autres musiciens du côté des Mailhot. Tout cela s'entend sur «*La grande ligne*». Stéphanie interprète aussi les airs d'autres grands mélodistes : la vigueur de Jos Bouchard, la grogne dans l'archet et l'ancrage dans la terre d'Isidore Soucy, la lenteur et la respiration de J. O. LaMadeleine et la beauté de Monsieur Édouard Richard.

Réalisé par Josianne Hébert de Galant tu perds ton temps, le disque fait entendre quelque pièces avec la voix de Stéphanie qui chante en arrière dans le mixage. Elle explique : « Je trouvais que la voix plus douce permettait de mettre en valeur le petit jeu d'accords. On a fait ça dans quelques airs de ma famille. Pour moi, le fait de chanter et de le mettre en arrière, c'est comme si quelqu'un nous surprenait en train de jouer et ne pouvait pas s'empêcher de chanter. C'est un peu ça la vision du disque».

Un très beau disque réalisé avec la collaboration de Josianne à l'harmonium, Jean-François Berthiaume aux percussions plurielles, son frère David à la guimbarde et Renaud Gratton au trombone.

«*Habillés en propre*», le troisième de ces nouveaux disques, est un duo de Stéphanie avec Jean-François Branchaud, multi instrumentiste impliqué au sein de nombreux projets dont la Bottine souriante, Ma Comère, B3 et Option Trad. De lui, son collègue Jocelyn Lapointe de la Bottine avait dit ceci : « Sa voix est un mélange du timbre plus aigu d'Yves Lambert et de la rondeur d'André Marchand ». Sur l'album, il joue aussi la guitare, la guitare ténor et les pieds, alors que Stéphanie revient au violon et à l'alto, mais en chantant davantage.

« On a monté les tounes ensemble, on a travaillé étape par étape. On avait jammé ensemble, mais on n'avait jamais travaillé ensemble. Ça a marché partout et le projet est né », raconte Jean-François. « Avec lui, ce qu'on vit, c'est une grande amitié qui est liée par la musique. Le répertoire est à la fois plein de douceur et de nostalgie avec en même temps un son

assez rieur avec une belle profondeur » ajoute Stéphanie. « On voulait que le répertoire soit québécois et pas mélangé avec l'irlandais. Par la bande, on retrouve aussi des chansons de la France », relance Jean-François. Par rapport à « *La grande ligne* », on trouve des sources qui reviennent comme Noël Ricard et J.O. LaMadeleine. On voyage aussi vers d'autres pointures de la tradition, de Philippe Bruneau à Jean Carignan, mais ici, les reels sont parfois ralentis. La violoneuse en parle : « Je voulais que certaines choses se prêtent à mon jeu. Oui, faire du Carignan, mais pas l'imiter parce que ça ne reflète pas mon jeu, c'est pas dans mon corps. Je l'ai admiré, j'ai essayé de le recopier, mais après quelques années, tu te dis que ce n'est pas nécessaire. J'aime pouvoir faire des ornements et quand ça va trop vite, elles ne sont plus aussi importantes ». L'accompagnement de Jean-François est bien équilibré avec son côté parfois plus soulevant, parfois plus jazz. Les deux voix se marient bien et le disque révèle des chansons d'amour, de revenant de la guerre, de voyageurs et du plus triste. Un autre beau travail.

Critiques

Vishtèn

Terre Rouge (Les Éditions Du Corbus)



Le titre du nouvel album de ce trio de multi-instrumentistes puissant et énergique est inspiré de la terre rouge de leurs îles

natales : les îles de la Madeleine et l'île du Prince-Édouard. Les sœurs jumelles Emmanuelle et Pastelle Leblanc, Pascal Miousse ainsi que le producteur, ingénieur et mélangeur du son et musicien Éloi Painchand ont réalisé ce qui doit être classé comme étant leur meilleur album à ce jour. Depuis quelque temps, influencée par d'autres artistes ainsi que son amie Sandy Silva, danseuse pour la Bottine Souriante, Emmanuelle étudie la danse percussive, ce qui ajoute au mélange déjà exaltant de musique buccale à laquelle s'adonne sa sœur Pastelle et de violon aux airs traditionnels et locaux explorés par Pascal. Il en résulte un album impétueux aux mélodies profondément rythmiques où violon, mandoline, guitare, voix, accordéon, piano, bodhrán, guimbarde, sifflements et basse de synthé s'entremêlent en une bourrasque tourbillonnante de chansons acadiennes, à la fois traditionnelles et furieusement dans l'air

du temps. Nul besoin d'être francophone ou celte pour apprécier cette musique qui émerge de deux racines, il suffit d'avoir des pieds et un cœur qui savent être mûs et être ému. Si vous pouvez rester assis sans bouger pendant « *Corandina* » et « *Joe Féraillé* » ou ne pas être touché par « *Je Vous Aime Tant* », « *Cœur En Mer* » ou « *Sarazine* », ce doit être parce que vous êtes mort.

- Par Barry Hammond
- Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

Boogat

Neo Reconquista (Maisonette)



Boogat est le nom de plume de Daniel Russo Garrido, MC hip-hop né à Mexico et résidant à Montréal. Son nouvel album succède à « *El Dorado Sunset* », sorti en 2013, qui lui avait valu deux Félix, dont l'un pour le meilleur album de musiques du monde. L'enchaînement des paroles de Garrido est décontracté et assuré, et comme le suggère le titre de l'album, ses textes sont souvent très politiques. Entouré d'un ensemble de musiciens qui font bon usage des cuivres, lui et son collaborateur musical principal, le DJ/producteur Ghislain Poirier, ont combiné des rythmes programmés avec les sons organiques produits par les musiciens pour créer des pistes qui empruntent toutes sortes de styles tropicaux comme la cumbia, le

mambo, la salsa et le reggae.

Même si la barrière des langues peut représenter un défi pour les anglophones, l'ambiance ici est universelle et ces pièces remarquables, telles que la pièce aux influences dancehall « *Londres* » (une collaboration avec le collègue montréalais Peirre Kwenders) et la funky « *Wena* », aux riffs de guitare entraînants, gagneront sans doute le cœur des habitués des planchers de danse d'origines diverses. Sortir un album après avoir eu beaucoup de succès peut être intimidant, mais Boogat s'est certainement montré à la hauteur avec ce nouvel album.

- Par Ian Menzies
- Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard





Chris MacLean

Émouvant, son nouvel album reflète le milieu rural québécois qui l'a vu grandir.

Par Pat Langdon

Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

Comptez-les. Parmi les 15 chansons de *Procrastinator*, le nouvel album folk/traditionnel assez convaincant de Chris MacLean, toutes sauf une parlent d'un aspect de la nature. Dans le premier titre, la berceuse spatiale « Close Your Eyes », des étoiles, des nuages et un ciel nordique se dessinent. Dans l'urgence espiègle de « Whiskey Kisses », c'est le mot « ouragan », simplement. Ailleurs, on trouvera un oiseau aux ailes sombres, puis une moraine couverte de lavande, possiblement un clin d'œil

à Alfred, Lord Tennyson et Alan Ginsberg, une fleur qui pousse à travers le béton.

La nature l'aide à s'ancrer, explique MacLean, qui a passé ses jeunes années à explorer les bois et les champs dans les environs de sa ville natale à Peterborough, Ontario. Elle habite maintenant en campagne près de Wakefield, Québec, au nord d'Ottawa. Placez-la dans une ville et « je vais bien pendant quelques jours puis je réalise que je suis anxieuse, je n'arrive pas à dormir. Quand je rentre à la maison, je me dis : "ah! voilà ce qui n'allait pas!" C'est tranquille ici, et puis il y a de l'espace. »

La nature était également au premier plan sur son premier album *Feet Be Still*, sorti en 2009. Couronné du Prix Colleen Peterson du Conseil des arts de l'Ontario pour la qualité de son écriture, cet album lui a également valu une nomi-

nation pour Auteur-compositeur anglophone de l'année des Prix de musique folk canadienne.

N'allez pas penser que MacLean, qui a travaillé avec l'ensemble indo-canadien Galitcha établi à Ottawa ainsi que le trio folk Frida's Brow, déteste les membres de sa propre espèce. Mais trop de gens au même endroit – par exemple sur une autoroute en plein trafic – peuvent donner lieu à ce qu'elle appelle un « nid de guêpes. L'énergie est là, mais elle n'est pas toujours amicale. »

La nature, en revanche, nous renouvelle, nous console et nous lie à quelque chose de plus grand que nous-mêmes. Ce contact avec la nature est mis en évidence à maintes reprises sur *Procrastinator*. Dans « Across the Channel Tonight », par exemple, nous apprenons que les eaux de la Manche ont par le passé mené un jeune homme vers

la guerre et vers la mort. Ces eaux représentent maintenant le passage de la vie à la mort qu'a emprunté la mère de MacLean en 2014, une femme qui fut jadis amoureuse de ce même jeune homme. Vers la fin de la chanson, aux accompagnements de guitare à pédales, d'orgue, de mellotron et de guitare, les passages du jeune homme et de la vieille femme fusionnent, produisant une continuité réconfortante qui, alliée aux puissances destructrices, est associée à la nature par les écrivains depuis des millénaires. En plus de générer l'une des chansons les plus émouvantes de l'album, la mort de sa mère bien-aimée eut une influence inattendue sur le nouvel album. La plupart des chansons ont été écrites avant 2014, mais puisque MacLean s'occupait de sa mère, l'enregistrement de l'album, financé par le Conseil des arts du Canada, fut retardé. « En fin de compte, nous l'avons réalisé vraiment rapidement », commente-t-elle. « Je me suis simplement jetée à l'eau. Cela a engendré un album plus vrai et plus vivant que si on avait arrangé telle affaire et telle chose, et telle autre affaire... »

Comme vous l'avez peut-être deviné à cause du titre de l'album, la seule pièce sur l'album qui ne parle pas de la nature, « se jeter dans l'eau », que ce soit pour un enregistrement ou pour toute autre activité, n'est pas la manière de procéder habituelle de MacLean. « Je remets à plus tard ce que je ne veux pas faire, et même lorsque je veux faire quelque chose, j'attends d'avoir réglé tous les détails. Cela me fâche d'avoir à faire des niaiseries comme passer la balayeuse ou laver ma voiture, car ces choses n'ont aucune importance pour mon processus créateur. »

La compréhension de certains aspects de soi-même – qui n'équivaut pas au fait d'agir sur ces aspects – a tendance à s'approfondir avec l'âge. MacLean, maintenant âgée de 58 ans et grand-mère de quatre petits-enfants, traite de cette question dans sa bio sur son site Web lorsqu'elle dit que les nouvelles chansons reflètent « une sagesse grandissante et bien méritée. »

On sent cette arrivée à la sagesse, ou du moins devant la porte de sa demeure, dans la chanson « Lay My Burden Down ». La chanson prit naissance lors d'une retraite de méditation à Assise, Italie, en 2011, où elle était musicienne en résidence (MacLean admet ne pas être très à l'aise avec la méditation). Le voyage comprenait une randonnée menant à un plateau de montagne, où la vue était si magnifique que « j'ai senti mon troupeau de douleurs s'élever et voler dans le ciel comme une petite volée d'oiseaux », comme le disent les paroles de sa chanson. Appelons ça la sagesse du lâcher-prise par rapport aux choses sur lesquelles on n'a aucun pouvoir. Si ce voyage en Italie lui permit de se libérer de beaucoup de tristesse, son séjour en Afrique du Sud en 2012 n'eut pas toujours le même effet.

MacLean y était dans le cadre de sa formation de thérapeute en Thérapie par la voix et le mouvement, où l'on considère la voix comme le véhicule d'une plus grande expression de soi. Lors d'une promenade de groupe, un collègue de classe fit la découverte d'une sacoche sur le côté d'un remblai de montagne. Son contenu, incluant de la lingerie et une pipe à crack, suggérait que la propriétaire disparue était une prostituée avec une dépendance à la drogue.

MacLean voulait en parler à la po-

lice locale, mais elle était convaincue que les autorités ne feraient rien pour elle. L'expérience trop proche pour être oubliée des histoires canadiennes sur les femmes autochtones disparues et tuées la hantait à un point tel qu'elle s'en remit à « Sweet Release », une puissante chanson sur le destin d'une jeune femme intoxiquée.

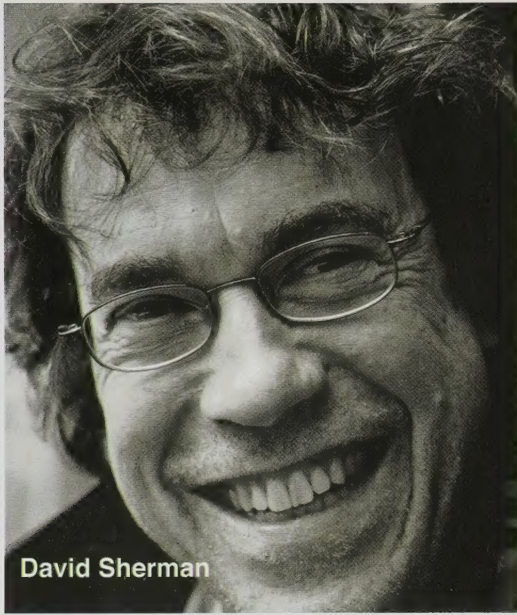
« Elle aurait pu être la fille de n'importe qui! », s'exclame MacLean. « Je voulais écrire une fin plus heureuse à ma chanson, mais chaque fois que je la chante je ressens l'aura de cette femme. »

Plus près de chez elle, MacLean aurait souhaité une fin plus heureuse pour le Ottawa Folklore Centre, un établissement cher à son cœur ainsi qu'à celui de beaucoup d'autres. Le magasin-école de musique a déclaré faillite en juillet, après 38 ans d'activités. Le fondateur/propriétaire Arthur McGregor a joué un rôle clé pour la scène de musique folk locale et nationale : il fut, entre autres, un des membres fondateurs des Prix de musique folk canadienne. La perte du Centre fut profondément ressentie dans la communauté de musique folk d'Ottawa et au-delà.

« Ça me brise le cœur. Je le prends comme la fin d'une époque », dit McLean, qui donnait des cours de chant au Centre et connaît McGregor depuis quatre décennies. « C'est à cause des occasions en ligne : les gens peuvent acheter des instruments en ligne, suivre des cours de musique en ligne... Mais le sentiment de communauté que le Centre de folklore engendrait est disparu; il est impossible de créer cette impression en ligne.

Certains d'entre nous se sentent orphelins. Le Centre était comme la maison de notre musique. »

A Point Of View



David Sherman

Singer/songwriter, journalist, award-winning filmmaker, playwright, and author, David Sherman asserts that few venue operators show respect for musicians.

For those of us lucky enough to toil on one level or another on the Tower of Song, plunking, scribbling, and singing remain as comfortable and familiar as well-worn leather. The view from the Tower, however, has rarely been more depressing.

Colleagues speak of leaking sweat, blood, and tears into their musical meanderings, but it's safe to say tears are reserved for members of the audience on a good night when a song strikes, well, a chord. And sweat only the byproduct of putting your shoulder into a song under hot lights in a crowded room, more a damp badge of courage than a symptom of the rigours of the craft of writing a tune.

For those of us happily addicted to forging verses and a chorus, changing strings or developing new calluses is about as physically demanding as the process gets, until you meet your audience.

On most days the Tower of Song is a fine and lucky place to be. But there are an ever-increasing number of venue operators who see music not as a contribution to the community or even entertainment. They see hosting music as a risk-free, way to bump up the bottom line with musicians doing the heavy lifting.

I have enjoyed several venue owners that care about music and cared about me. They, as do many others, offer hospitality, first-class meals, good vibes, cash, and appreciation. And to them we say, "Thank you" and "Can you give lessons?"

For every one of these special people, there are a half-dozen who see musicians as spotlit slave labour—they pay nothing, offer less—you bring the audience to pay for your food and drink. Their business model means they do minimal or no publicity and don't sully their hands collecting "donations" for "guest artists". Musicians go table-to-table begging or go home broke.

The musician provides profit, he brings the customers and, like them, often pays full price, though sometimes not treated as well.

Consequently, audiences who come for beer and camaraderie often resent the poor bastard onstage as an interruption to their iPhone streaming, Instagramming, and the sharing thereof, often at high volumes.

But when music is free, why would anyone respect the poor schmuck or schmuck-ess onstage, especially if they are folk or roots guys without aid of clanging cymbals and electric guitars to be heard over the din?

The song and those delivering it are more devalued commodities of the digital age, like news, books, CDs, and DVDs.

Where music and audiences cook together are in house concerts—paradise for roots and folk players. Hosts are hospitable, guests happily pay \$15-\$25 for a show, sit quietly, listen, buy a CD or two, and say thank you. The monetary transaction has helped define its value.

Once a venue, with the complicity of the artist hungry for a stage, gives the show away, it's easy for customers to concentrate on their beer mugs, the chest of their companion, and the glare of their smart phones rather than the woman behind the microphone.

Maplepost had a well-meaning post recently that some applauded, advising musicians that they not only had to perfect their craft but fabricate great publicity and marketing materials and behave themselves, lest they be virally shunned by bookers.

In between writing songs, performing, chasing gigs, and making a living doing something else, musicians were expected

to master social media, boost their posts on Facebook, Tweet religiously about their dogs and other minutiae to build rapport, and try to accumulate "likes" and be good boys. The music was almost an after-thought.

I have not always been a good boy. Playing out East, I exchanged polite but rancorous email with a venue owner who took umbrage when I suggested it might be hospitable if he sold musicians food at cost since the \$100 performance fee didn't come close to the expenses involved in getting to the venue, spending the night, and eating. He even charged for soft drinks. I suggested that musicians paid poorly to entertain his paying customers shouldn't be also milked for food and drink. He complained about how hard it was for him to make money but, "if we cared, the audience liked the show". The message was he had to make a living, we did not. Pleasing his guests was not a result of work worth compensation.

In Toronto, a well-known club paid nothing, demanded \$40 for someone to take tickets, did no publicity, charged for soft drinks, and tried to sell us caps for \$15.

And then there are the ubiquitous clubs where open-mic nights fill the place, musicians buying food and drink for the chance to sing a song or two to other musicians.

When clubs pay nothing, risk nothing, there is no motivation for them to do anything to get butts on seats other than open the doors. The musician brings the audience and the club cashes in.

And if you fail to drag an audience in, there are more than a few venue owners who treat you like something stuck to the bottom of their shoe.

In the digital age many of us are plucked like pigeons, paying to play, to manage websites, to enter songwriting contests, to apply to festivals, to have our music "critiqued", to "boost our posts", for video and pics to promote ourselves. We've drank the Kool-Aid of the social media business model, draining our resources while enriching shareholders preying on our ambitions.

There might be no blood, sweat, or tears in the Tower of Song. But sometimes, the view of the carnage wrought by the digital revolution provokes, as Jesse Winchester once sang, "a sadness too sad to be true".

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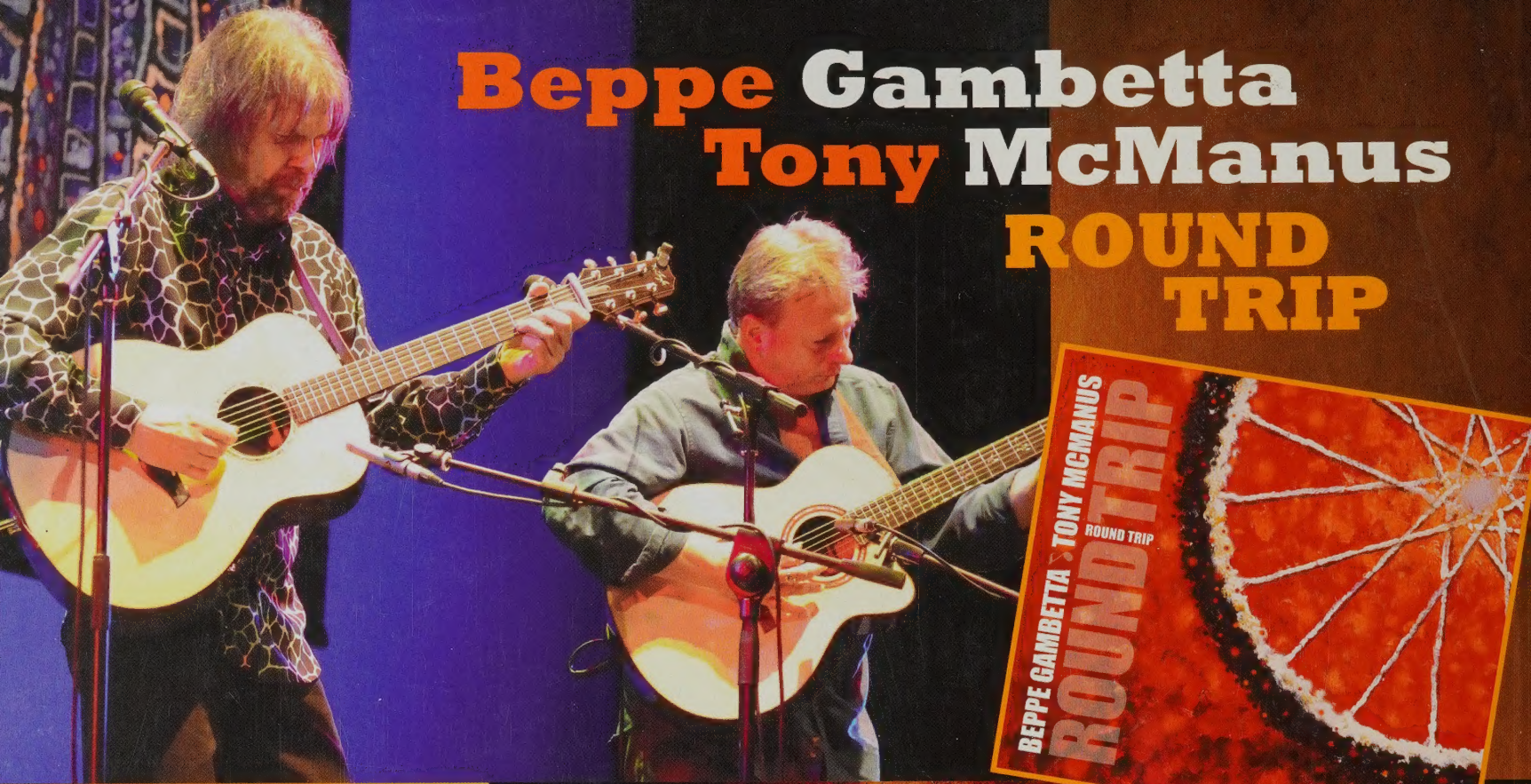
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—Allison Brock, Artistic Director

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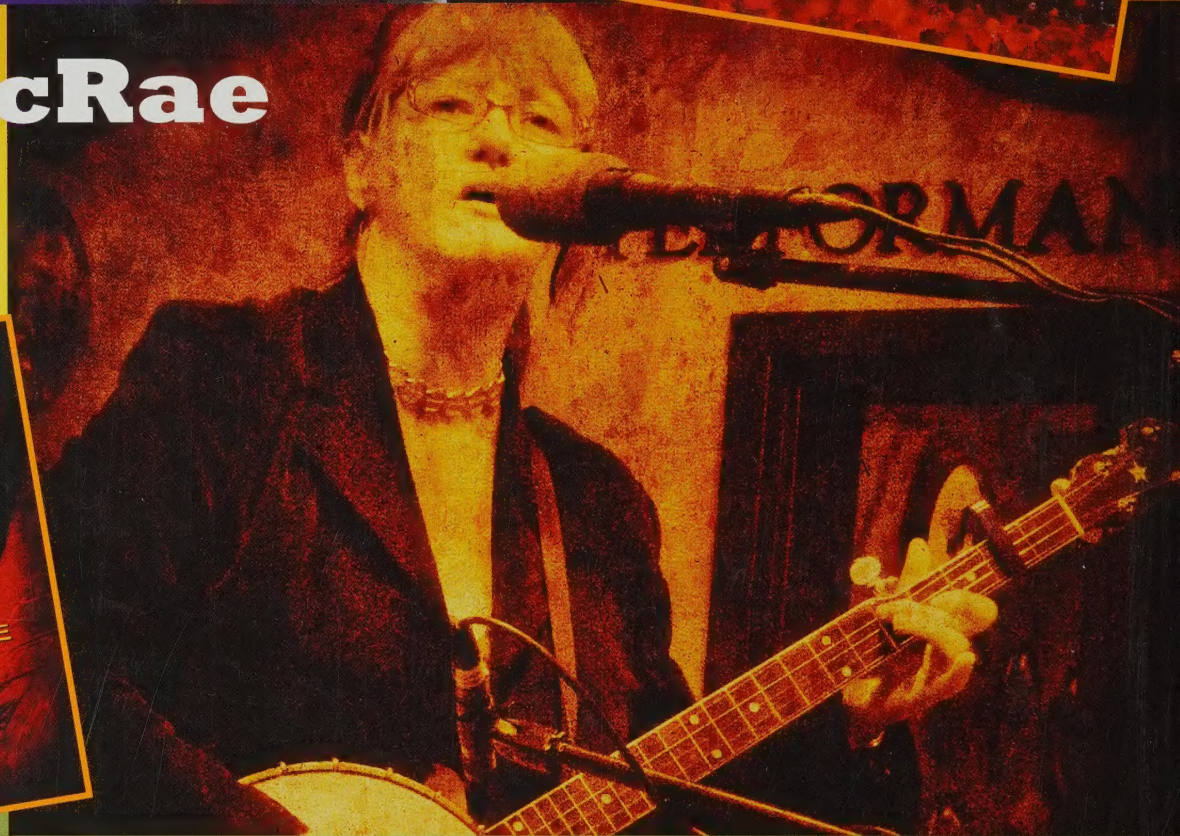
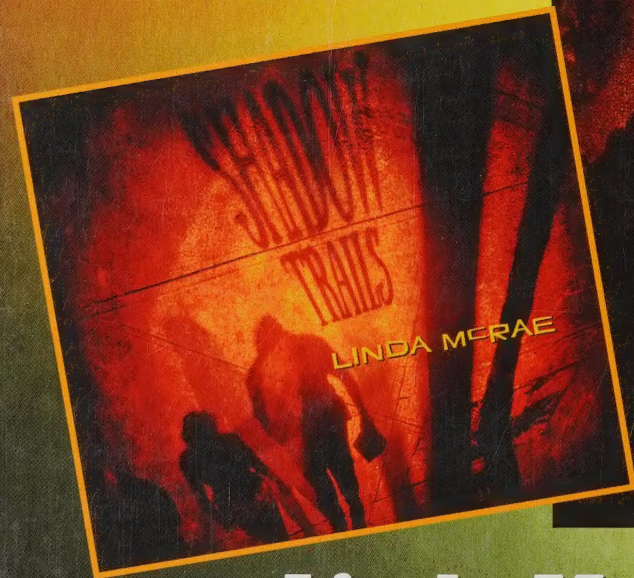




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